

3/6  
NET

**FOLLIES AND FRAUDS**  
OF  
**SPIRITUALISM**

BY  
**WALTER MANN**

**T**HE campaign being conducted by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and others on behalf of Spiritualism renders a counter-offensive necessary. This book discusses the modern development of the craze from the time of the Fox Sisters to the present day, and skilfully exposes a series of remarkable frauds and equally surprising exhibitions of credulity.

LONDON: WATTS & CO.

THE

**LIBRARY**  
**NATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, Ltd.**

CALIFORNIA

SAN DIEGO

Secretary and Registered Offices:

CHARLES T. GORHAM, Nos. 5 & 6 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

THE minimum subscription to constitute Membership is 5s., renewable in January of each year.

A form of application for Membership, with full particulars, including latest Annual Report and specimen copy of the *Literary Guide* (the unofficial organ of the Association), can be obtained gratis on application to the Secretary, Charles T. Gorham, Nos. 5 and 6 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

Copies of new publications are forwarded regularly on account of Members' subscriptions, or a Member can arrange to make his own selection from the lists of new books which are issued from time to time.

To join the Association is to help on its work, but to subscribe liberally is of course to help more effectually. As Subscribers of from 5s. to 10s. and more are entitled to receive back the whole value of their subscriptions in books, on which there is little if any profit made, the Association is dependent, for the capital required to carry out its objects, upon subscriptions of a larger amount and upon donations and bequests.

---

*'Lucid, well arranged, concise, suggestive discussion.'*—DAILY HERALD.

## THE INQUIRER'S LIBRARY.

Each 160 pp.; cloth, 1s. 3d. net, by post 1s. 6d. The 5 vols. post free to any inland address 6s. 9d. (foreign 7s. 3d.).

THE INQUIRER'S LIBRARY is intended to fill an acknowledged gap in advanced literature. There is no such thing in English as a series of handy and easily purchasable volumes dealing with the fundamental issues of religious controversy. The inquirer who would meet the arguments of his neighbour has to roam through many large volumes in search of the answer. The new "Library" deals concisely with various leading issues, and forms a brief cyclopædia of researches thereon. It contains historical sketches of the development of religions and sects, and replies to all current arguments of supernaturalists.

### ALREADY ISSUED.

No. 1.—THE EXISTENCE OF GOD. By Joseph McCabe.

No. 2.—THE BELIEF IN PERSONAL IMMORTALITY. By E. S. P. Haynes.

No. 3.—THE OLD TESTAMENT. By Chilperic Edwards.

No. 4.—CHRISTIANITY AND CIVILIZATION. By Charles T. Gorham.

No. 5.—THE NEW TESTAMENT. By F. J. Gould.

London: WATTS & CO., 17 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street E.C.4.

THE FOLLIES AND FRAUDS  
OF  
SPIRITUALISM

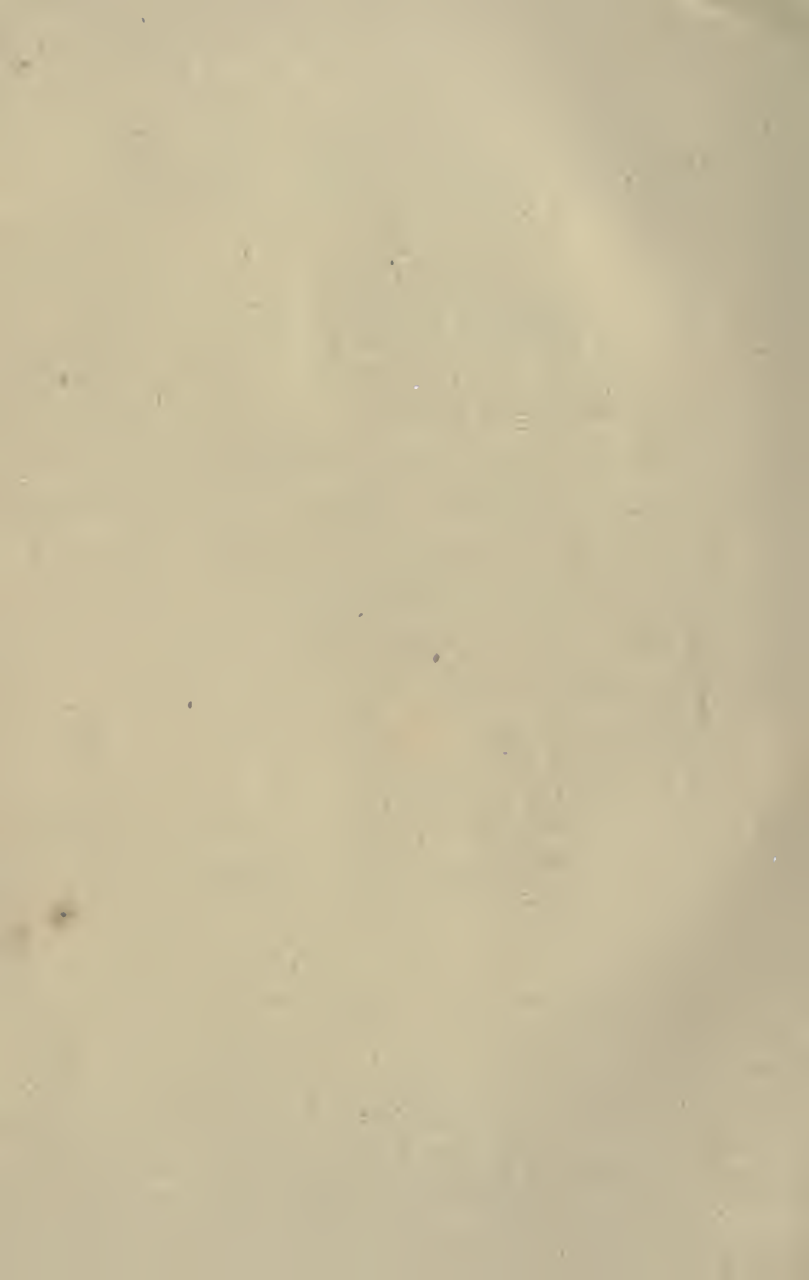
Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

THE FOLLIES AND FRAUDS  
OF  
SPIRITUALISM

BY  
WALTER MANN

(ISSUED FOR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, LTD.)

LONDON:  
WATTS & CO.,  
17 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.4.  
1919



## CONTENTS

---

CHAP.	PAGE
I. SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALISM - -	1
II. THE FOX SISTERS AND SPIRIT-RAPPING -	9
III. SLADE AND SPIRIT WRITING - -	25
IV. D. D. HOME: "THE NAPOLEON OF THE MEDIUMS" - - - -	34
V. THE DAVENPORT BROTHERS - -	57
VI. EGLINTON AND MR. STEAD - -	66
VII. ROBERT OWEN AND HIS SON - -	70
VIII. THE NATURALIST DR. WALLACE - -	74
IX. SIR WILLIAM CROOKES AND FLORRIE COOK	86
X. MADAME BLAVATSKY: THE FOUNDER OF THEOSOPHY - - - -	94
XI. EUSAPIA PALLADINO - - - -	115
XII. SCIENCE, TELEPATHY, AND COMMUNION WITH THE DEAD - - - -	131





Where the miraculous is concerned neither considerable intellectual ability, nor undoubted honesty, nor knowledge of the world, nor proved faithfulness as civil historians, nor profound piety, on the part of eye-witnesses and contemporaries, affords any guarantee of the objective truth of their statements, when we know that a firm belief in the miraculous was ingrained in their minds, and was the pre-supposition of their observations and reasonings.—PROFESSOR HUXLEY, *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 329.

You urge, in vain, that science has given us all the knowledge of the universe which we now possess, while Spiritualism has added nothing to that knowledge. The drugged soul is beyond the reach of reason. It is in vain that impostors are exposed and the special demon cast out. He has but slightly to change his shape, return to his house, and find it "empty, swept, and garnished."—PROFESSOR TYNDALL, *Fragments of Science*, p. 322.

It is extremely unsafe to assume that because Sir Oliver Lodge is a high authority upon electricity, therefore his conclusions about ghosts must be well founded and worthy of adoption. Probably few people would maintain that they adopt his conclusions about ghosts on the ground that he is an authority upon electricity, but there is no doubt whatever that this is in fact the ground on which a very great many people do adopt his conclusions.—DR. CHARLES A. MERCIER, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge* (1917), p. 68.

The whole past and present history of what is called "the occult" is enveloped in an atmosphere of self-deception and of readiness to be deceived by others to which misplaced confidence in their own cleverness and power of detecting trickery renders many—one may almost say most—people victims. The physician who has given his life to the study of mental aberration and diseases of the mind is the only really qualified investigator of these "marvels," and no one who has closely studied what is known in the domain of mental physiology and pathology has any difficulty in understanding, and bringing into relation with large classes of established facts as to illusions and mental aberration, the "beliefs" in magic and second-sight which are here and there found flourishing at the present day, as well as the, at first sight startling, evidence of highly accomplished men who have suffered from such delusions,—SIR RAY LANKESTER, *Diversions of a Naturalist* (1915), pp. 363-64.

It is with the psychical phenomena that Spiritualists are now mainly concerned, and when we examine the materials for belief in, and knowledge of the conditions under which the departed exist in, another life, which these supply, one is staggered that minds of lofty conceptions and ideals can build on them the superstructure of personal immortality. From the enormous mass of communications purporting to come from discarnate spirits not an ennobling nor high-toned message can be extracted; all, all is nauseating, frivolous, mischievous, spurious drivel. Through his control, (the spirit of) a little Indian girl Feda, (the spirit of) Raymond Lodge tells his father that the houses in the Beyond are made "from sort of emanations from the earth"; that his white robe is "made from decayed worsted on your side"; that he has his "little doggie" with him; that cigars made "out of essences and ethers and gases" are provided for smokers, and "whisky-sodas" for drinkers! Faugh! —EDWARD CLODD, *Strand Magazine*, July, 1917, p. 54.

One day, alone and immersed in business in his "Cabinet," Oliver found himself confronted by a stranger who had somehow gained entry. The stranger stated that the Lord Jesus had appeared to him and announced that he, the stranger, would receive some great consideration at his, the Lord Protector's, hands; failing which, the consequences would, or might, be unpleasant for him, Oliver.

Cromwell, who, at this period at any rate, did not suffer from "nerves," explained to the stranger that it "was not the Lord Jesus, but a lying devil," who had appeared to him; that therefore he, Oliver, was under no moral obligation to comply with his requirements, still less was he, the stranger, obliged to take any further steps in the matter.

This view of the case so "flabbergasted" the stranger that he was left without an answer, and at once withdrew—and, no doubt, was suitably cared for outside. Oliver went on with his work.

It occurred to the writer that, had Sir Oliver been able (as regards "Myers") to emulate the scepticism of his great namesake, some trouble—and much mischief—would have been obviated.—W. COOK, *Reflections on Raymond*, p. 51.

## CHAPTER I

### SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALISM

To surround anything, however monstrous or ridiculous, with an air of mystery is to invest it with a charm and power of attraction which to the crowd is irresistible. False priests, false prophets, false doctors, false patriots, false prodigies of every kind, veiling their proceedings in mystery, have always addressed themselves at an immense advantage to the popular credulity, and have been, perhaps, more indebted to that resource, in gaining and keeping for a time the upper hand of truth and common sense, than to any half-dozen items in the whole catalogue of imposture.—CHARLES DICKENS, *Barnaby Rudge*, ch. xxvii.

At the present time we are being inundated by one of those periodic waves of superstition to which the human race is so liable. The Crusades and the witchcraft mania are typical examples from history; and in more recent times there was the craze for Spiritualism which swept over America, and from there to Europe, between 1848 and 1885. This arose from the "physical phenomena" produced by the Fox Sisters, Slade, Home, Eusapia Palladino, Madame Blavatsky, and others. Forty years ago, as Mr. Frank Podmore observes, "the number of avowed Spiritualists in this country and the States at that time might be reckoned probably by tens of thousands; some Spiritualistic writers claimed millions."<sup>1</sup> After repeated exposures of the frauds

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Studies in Psychical Research* (1897), p. 2. Mr. Podmore is recognized as one of the highest authorities on the subject of Spiritualism.

practised by mediums, the epidemic subsided. But the superstition was only scotched—not slain; and to-day we are witnessing a great revival of Spiritualism. Not, it is true, of the old discredited performances with tables and chairs—although these have not been altogether wanting—but of the “psychical” variety—namely, messages purporting to be received from the spirits of the dead. The War was largely responsible for this reaction. Anxiety about relatives killed or missing drove large numbers of people, mostly women, to the mediums in the desperate hope of obtaining information denied by the ordinary channels.

The revival also owes a great deal to what, Dr. Charles Mercier says, “may fairly be called a raging, tearing propagandism in favour of Spiritualism, telepathy, clairvoyance, crystal gazing, and all forms and manifestations of occultism,”<sup>1</sup> by Sir Oliver Lodge, whose last book on the subject, *Raymond*, has “sold in tens of thousands of copies, and continues, I am told, to sell at a great rate.”

Dr. Mercier also observes that “the advertisements of mediums in the papers devoted to Spiritualism became very numerous until the prosecution of some of the more notorious, when the advertisements suddenly ceased to appear. The public is so thoroughly permeated and excited with the propaganda that at the trial of one notorious medium it was stated that, if the matter was pushed, half London would be implicated. Cardinal Bourne and

<sup>1</sup> Dr. C. Mercier, *The Hibbert Journal*, July, 1917, p. 598.

Father Vaughan have found it necessary to warn their flocks against the prevailing heresy. People in trains, tramcars, shops, restaurants, and clubs are all talking Spiritualism. The thing has caught hold in a way and to a degree that has not happened for more than a generation; indeed, it is doubtful if a parallel could be found more recent than the witch-mania in the seventeenth century.”<sup>1</sup>

The object of this book is to collect the facts regarding Spiritualism in a convenient form for those who have neither the time nor the opportunity to search them out for themselves.

We are often asked—not only by Spiritualists, but by open-minded inquirers—how we can account for the fact that so many famous scientists have given their adhesion to Spiritualism if there is no truth in it, and if it is founded upon fraud? This is a legitimate question, and deserves a reasoned answer. It is an undoubted fact that many scientific men have become convinced of the truth of Spiritualism. Zollner, the famous professor of astronomy, and Professors Fechner, Schreibner, and Weber, were converted by the physical manifestations of the notorious medium Slade. Professors Richet and Lombroso, Dr. Ochorowicz, Sir Oliver Lodge, and F. W. H. Myers all declared for the genuineness of the physical phenomena produced by that arch-impostor, the medium Eusapia Palladino. Sir William Crookes, the famous physicist, fell to the wiles of Florrie Cooke, who actually materialized a

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 598.



female spirit who allowed Sir William to walk about the room with her, arm-in-arm, and also, after obtaining permission, to embrace her! Wallace, the great naturalist, endorsed the same superstition.

Here we have an imposing array of names, and Spiritualists make the most of them. No one will deny that they were really great men in the department of science to which they had dedicated their lives. There are, however, many proofs<sup>1</sup> that a man may reach the highest eminence as a scientific investigator, and yet go deplorably astray in matters outside his special studies. As Professor Jastrow has well observed: "There is a very broadspread notion that anybody can go to Spiritualistic *séances* and give a reliable opinion as to whether what he or she may chance to see is explicable as conjuring or not"; but "it is probably not an exaggeration to maintain that most such claimants are about as competent to form a trustworthy opinion on such a subject as they are to pronounce upon the genuineness of a Syriac manuscript." And he concludes that "it is not at all to the discredit of any one's powers of observation or intellectual acumen to be deceived by the performances of a conjurer, and the same holds true of the professional part of mediumistic phenomena. Until this homely but salutary truth is impressed with all its importance upon all intending investigators, there is little hope of bringing about a proper attitude towards these and kindred phenomena."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. Mann, *The Religion of Famous Men*.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. J. Jastrow, *Fact and Fable in Psychology* (1901), pp. 147-48.

How can a man who cannot detect the sleight-of-hand of a common conjurer, performed in the full glare of the footlights, expect to see through the tricks of a professional medium performed in partial or complete darkness? As Dr. Ivor Tuckett remarks in commenting on Sir William Crookes's adventure with the materialized spirit: "The fact of the matter is that scientific men, who are accustomed to accurate laboratory conditions and instruments, which do not lie or give rise to error—at any rate consciously—are no match for the subtle degrees of deception practised by Home, Moses (Stainton Moses), and Eusapia. Because the latter appear in their daily intercourse to be reliable, honest persons, the former cannot admit of their being on other occasions the authors of fraud."<sup>1</sup> The soul of truthfulness themselves, they are quite incapable of attributing fraud to others. Mr. Podmore also observes: "The untrained eye is no match for the trained hand of the conjurer. The kind of observation demanded of the investigators at a Spiritualistic *séance*—an observation which is alive to the various artifices employed to distract it, and which, if not actually unremitting, is at least aware of its own lapses—is a quality not called for and not exercised in the investigations of the physical laboratory, and not to be acquired, even to a moderate extent, except by education of a very special kind."<sup>2</sup>

Herbert Spencer, the personification of pure intel-

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ivor Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural* (1911), pp. 62-63.

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 221.

lect, if ever there was one, surprised his friends by observing that he thought he would be "an easy dupe at a Spiritualist *séance*."<sup>1</sup> Probably he was right; but in any case the candour of his confession is a rebuke to those who rush in and deliver judgment upon questions which they are utterly unqualified, either by nature or training, to discuss.

Helmholtz, one of the very greatest scientific minds of the nineteenth century, recognized this clearly. When he was on a visit to England the Psychical Society sought to interest him in the case of two little girls, the daughters of a clergyman, one of whom held up a playing-card behind a closed door, while her sister on the other side described it. When told of this performance by a college professor who had experimented with the children; Helmholtz could hardly take him seriously. The Professor, somewhat nettled, named some of his eminent colleagues in the investigation, and said they should be credited with enough common sense to test a thing like that; but, finding Helmholtz still incredulous, he asked: "Would you believe it if you saw it yourself?" "Certainly not," answered Helmholtz; "in my investigations, if anything peculiar appears, I do not accept it on the evidence of my eyes. Before any new thing can be even provisionally accepted, I must bring it to the test of many instruments, and if it survives all my tests, then I send it over here to Tyndall, and to investigators in other countries. No, I would not believe

<sup>1</sup> *Athenæum*, July, 1908. (Review of Duncan's *Life of Spencer*.)



any abnormal phenomena on the mere testimony of my eyes.”<sup>1</sup> Moncure Conway, who narrates this, adds: “The scepticism of Helmholtz was justified in the case of the clergyman’s daughters, who were detected in their clever trick.” And it should be remembered that Helmholtz knew more about the mechanism and limitations of the eye than any other man of his time. It was he who invented the ophthalmoscope, by means of which the examination of the living retina was first made possible.

Mr. William Marriott, an expert conjurer who has unmasked the frauds of the mediums, writes as follows:—

I say advisedly that scientists, however eminent, are emphatically *not* the people to investigate these matters. If Lombroso and Zollner could return again from the dead, and sit, with Sir William Crookes, as a committee to investigate, say, the mysteries worked by Mr. Maskelyne, either on his own ground or on theirs, does any one suppose that they would detect a single one of his secrets? Spiritualists may think so, but conjurers know better. The scientist who sits where he is told to sit and looks where he is told to look is the ideal subject for the wiles of the conjurer or the medium, and before him effects can be brought off that would be impossible before an audience of schoolboys.<sup>2</sup>

What is required to test a Spiritualist *séance* is not a scientist fresh from the laboratory, but an expert illusionist and conjurer like Mr. J. N. Maskelyne, who has assisted at the exposure of

<sup>1</sup> M. D. Conway, *Autobiography*, vol. ii, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> William Marriott, “On the Edge of the Unknown,” *Pearson's Magazine* (June, 1910), pp. 607–608.

many mediums. He declares emphatically in his book, *The Supernatural*: "There does not exist, and there never has existed, a professed medium of any note who has not been convicted of trickery and fraud" (p. 183).

It should be borne in mind that a great number of equally great men have given their verdict emphatically against Spiritualism. Among them we find Darwin, Mill, Faraday, Sir David Brewster, Professors Huxley, Tyndall, and Clifford, Herbert Spencer, Helmholtz, Sir Ray Lankester, Sir Bryan Donkin, and Lord Kelvin. Few people, we imagine—outside his circle of personal friends—would consider Sir Oliver Lodge, as a physicist, the equal of Lord Kelvin. Neither is Wallace regarded as the equal of Darwin; for, although Wallace was the co-discoverer of Natural Selection, he frankly admitted that he could not have written Darwin's great work, *The Origin of Species*. Few competent judges would consider Sir William Crookes the scientific equal of Helmholtz, to say nothing of Faraday and Tyndall.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FOX SISTERS AND SPIRIT-RAPPING

A deep longing for some direct proof of existence after death has made hundreds of people accept the grossest impostures of "Spiritualism," impostures which contradict the most massive experiences of the race, and which had nothing to support them save this emotional credulity acting where direct knowledge was wholly absent.—G. H. LEWES, *Problems of Life and Mind* (1879), p. 168.

Whoever seriously thinks that superhuman beings have ever given our race information as to the aim of its existence and that of the world is still in his childhood. There is no other revelation than the thoughts of the wise.—SCHOPENHAUER, *Religion and Other Essays*, p. 117.

TABLE-RAPPING is one of the commonest phenomena of the Spiritualist *séance*. Once the knack of producing the raps has been acquired, it is the most mystifying, the easiest, and the safest of all the medium's bag of tricks. It requires no apparatus, and there is no danger of discovery; hence its popularity among mediums. Table-turning and table-rapping generally form the introduction to the greater marvels of Spiritualism. Once the beginner is firmly grounded in a belief in these phenomena as the work of spirits, the rest is easy; he abandons his critical attitude, and is ready to accept any tricks the medium cares to play.

Although the phenomena are known as table-rapping, the raps are in fact not produced on the

## 10 THE FOX SISTERS AND SPIRIT-RAPPING

table. The name itself is a fraud, for it leads the sitters to concentrate their attention upon the table and upon the medium's hands, though the production of the raps is due to neither. As a matter of fact, the inventors of this fraud—the Fox sisters, in America—first produced the mysterious raps while lying in bed. It is to these two sisters, aged respectively twelve and fifteen, that Podmore ascribes the birth of modern Spiritualism. From the “Rochester knockings,” he says, “arose the whole movement of modern Spiritualism.”<sup>1</sup> Although they were not the first to profess to communicate with spirits, the interest created by the performances of these two children spread like a prairie fire. Professional mediums sprang up in all directions. As we shall see later, Daniel Dunglas Home, one of the greatest of mediums, received his first impulse towards Spiritualism from this source. In fact, the movement started by these two girls became world-wide.

It was in a small farmhouse at Hydesville, a village in the township of Arcadia, Wayne County, New York, that the mysterious rappings were first heard. The house was then occupied by a Methodist farmer, John D. Fox, who had entered upon the tenancy during the previous year. The household consisted of the farmer, his wife Margaret, and two unmarried daughters, Margaretta and Katie. There

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Psychical Research* (1897), p. 9. Mr. J. N. Maskelyne says “little Katey Fox will ever be known as the real founder of the physical manifestations of modern Spiritualism” (*Modern Spiritualism*, by J. N. Maskelyne, p. 28).

were also a married son, living about two miles away (he plays no part in this history), and a married daughter, Mrs. Fish, afterwards successively Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Underhill, living in Rochester, N.Y.

Mrs. Fish appears to have been the real author of all the mischief, although it was through the two girls that the public first became acquainted with the rappings. According to Podmore: "On the evening of March 31, 1848, the Fox family, who, by their own account, had passed several disturbed nights previously by reason of the raps and other noises in the house, went to bed early, in order to make up their arrears of sleep. What follows is based upon the testimony of the Foxes. The girls were already in bed, and their parents—who occupied another bed in the same room—were about to follow when the raps were again heard. On this occasion, in reply to a challenge given by one of the girls, the raps repeated, sound for sound, the noises which she made by snapping her fingers, and again and again gave the number of raps asked for. At this proof of an intelligent cause for the raps, Mrs. Fox, prescient that the matter was one of no ordinary moment, resolved to call in her friends and neighbours, that they also might bear witness."<sup>1</sup>

On the two following days hundreds of people came to witness the marvel, and in the course of the next two or three years the rappings spread throughout the greater part of the Eastern States. In 1851 it was estimated that there were a hundred

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. i, p. 180.



## 12 THE FOX SISTERS AND SPIRIT-RAPPING

mediums in New York City, and fifty or sixty private circles in Philadelphia. "The Fox family—the mother and the three daughters"—says Podmore, "practised no unwise parsimony of their spiritual gifts. In the course of the years 1849 and 1850 they appear to have given demonstrations of their power in several large towns before considerable audiences. Their claims to supernormal power did not, of course, escape challenge. Again and again committees were appointed to examine the subject and report. But for some time the source of the rappings remained inexplicable."<sup>1</sup>

Horace Greeley publicly testified to the genuineness of the girls' performance. Commenting on a visit they paid to New York in August, 1850, he says in his paper, the *New York Tribune*, that during a stay of several weeks in New York they were subjected to every reasonable test; their rooms at the hotel had been repeatedly searched; "they have been all unconsciously placed on a glass surface concealed under the carpet, in order to interrupt electric vibrations; they have been disrobed by a committee of ladies appointed without notice, and insisting that neither of them should leave the room until the investigation had been made, etc.; yet we believe no one to this moment pretends that he has detected either of them in producing or causing the rappings"; and he concludes: "Whatever may be the origin or the cause of the 'rappings,' the ladies in whose presence they occur do not make them.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 183.

We tested this thoroughly, and to our entire satisfaction.”<sup>1</sup>

But the day of detection was at hand. A fraud cannot be publicly exploited for ever. The very success which at the beginning carries everything before it contains the seeds of ultimate defeat. A small circle trained to implicit belief in the supernatural phenomena may be kept permanently at that stage, but when the medium appears before the world and challenges public inquiry the rational-minded begin to apply the scientific method to these marvels, and they melt like ice before the fire.

In December of the same year the Fox girls came to Buffalo, N.Y., where they stayed for some weeks, giving public exhibitions of their marvellous powers. Among those who visited them were three doctors—Flint, Lee, and Coventry. These gentlemen wrote a joint letter to a local newspaper, pointing out that the rappings could be explained by movements of the knee-joints, and stating that a lady of their acquaintance had actually produced similar sounds by that means. Mrs. Fish, the married sister of the Fox girls, promptly challenged the doctors to prove the truth of their theory at a personal interview, confident that nothing could prevent the raps from being heard, and trusting in the well-known difficulty always experienced in locating a sound unless the object causing it can be seen in motion. In the matter of preventing the rapping, they utterly deceived themselves ; the three doctors were skilled

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 183.

## 14 THE FOX SISTERS AND SPIRIT-RAPPING

anatomists, and came prepared with a very definite and, as it proved, successful test.

The two Fox girls were seated on a sofa, and immediately began business with a series of loud raps in rapid succession. The spirits were then asked whether they would respond to questions; to which they rapped out an assent. The report continues as follows: "The two females were then seated upon two chairs placed near together, their heels resting on cushions, their lower limbs extended, with the toes elevated, and the feet separated from each other. The object of this experiment was to secure a position in which the ligaments of the knee-joints should be made tense, and no opportunity offered to make pressure with the foot. We were pretty well satisfied that the displacement of the bones requisite for the sounds could not be effected unless a fulcrum were obtained by resting one foot upon the other, or on some resisting body. The company, seated in a semicircle, quietly waited for the '*manifestations*' for more than half an hour, but the '*spirits*,' generally so noisy, were now dumb. ....On resuming the usual position on the sofa, the feet resting on the floor, *knockings* very soon began to be heard. It was then suggested that some other experiment be made. This was assented to, notwithstanding the first was, in our minds, amply conclusive. The experiment selected was, that the knees of the two females should be firmly grasped, with the hands so applied that any lateral movement of the bones was made perceptible to the touch. The pressure was made through the dress.



.....The hands were kept in apposition for several minutes at a time, and the experiment repeated frequently for the course of an hour or more with negative results; that is to say, there were plenty of *raps* when the knees were not held and none when the hands were applied, save once. As the pressure was intentionally relaxed (Dr. Lee being the holder), two or three faint, single *raps* were heard, and Dr. Lee immediately averred that the motion of the bone was plainly perceptible to him. The experiment of seizing the knees as quickly as possible when the knockings first commenced was tried several times, but always with the effect of putting an immediate *quietus* upon the *manifestations*.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, by a couple of simple scientific tests, the secret was revealed. “One Chauncey Burr,” says Podmore, “earned some fame at this time by giving lectures on Spiritualism, in which he demonstrated that the raps could be produced by the toe-joints.”

Three doctors—Flint, Lee, and Coventry—were, as we have seen, associated in the public exposure of the Fox girls; but, according to Dr. Carpenter, it was Dr. Austin Flint who first sought for a physiological explanation of the raps. He seems to have owed his discovery to the fact that a patient of his own was able to produce an exact imitation of the Rochester rappings. Dr. Austin Flint’s explanation subsequently received full confirmation from Professor Schiff, since of Florence, who not only

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Podmore, vol. ii, pp. 184-85.

acquired the power of producing the raps, by the repeated displacement of a tendon which slides through a sheath behind the external protuberance of the ankle, but exhibited this acquirement to the French Academy of Medicine in April, 1859, baring his legs, and producing the raps without any apparent movement.”<sup>1</sup>

A few weeks after the public detection of the Fox girls further proof of the fraud was made public. Mrs. Norman Culver, a connection by marriage of the Fox family, stated that one of the girls had confessed to her how the raps were produced. Mrs. Culver’s statement, written out on April 17, 1851, and attested by two witnesses (a doctor and a clergyman), was published in the *New York Herald*. The raps were produced by the knees and toes.

Mrs. Culver says that she had for two years believed the raps to be genuine, but latterly, noting some suspicious circumstances, she had offered to assist Catherine. Catherine—her sister being absent—had gladly accepted the offer, and Mrs. Culver, under Catherine’s instruction, became fairly adept in producing the raps by means of the toe-joints. The statement continues:—

Catherine told me how to manage to answer the questions. She said the reason why they asked people to write down several names on paper, and then point to them till the spirit rapped at the right one, was to give them a chance to watch the countenance and motions of the person, and in that way they could nearly always guess right.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. W. B. Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism, etc., Historically and Scientifically Considered* (1877), p. 102.

She also explained how they held down and moved tables. (Mrs. Culver gave us some illustrations of the tricks.) She told me that all I should have to do to make the raps heard on the table would be to put my foot on the bottom of the table when I rapped, and that when I wished to make the raps sound distant on the wall I must make them louder, and direct my own eyes earnestly to the spot where I wished them to be heard. She said that if I could put my foot against the bottom of the door the raps would be heard at the top of the door.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Culver learned from Catherine that Mrs. Fish's little daughter Elizabeth had actually discovered how to make the raps by playing with her toes against the footboard of the bed. Now, Mrs. Fish was a married sister of the Fox girls, and, as she accompanied them on their public performances, it is probable that she was the moving spirit of the whole fraud.

In the autumn of 1888, says Podmore, "Mrs. Kane (Margaretta Fox) and Mrs. Jencken (Catherine Fox) made public, and apparently spontaneous, confession that the raps had been produced by fraudulent means. Mrs. Kane even gave demonstrations before large audiences of the actual manner in which the toe-joints had been used at the early *séances*. Mrs. Jencken, at any rate, if not also Mrs. Kane, afterwards recanted her confession."<sup>2</sup> Whether they recanted or not, they were thoroughly unreliable characters, and nothing they afterwards said or did

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. i, pp. 185-86.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 188. The confession of the Fox girls appeared in the *New York Herald* for September 24, 1888.

## 18 THE FOX SISTERS AND SPIRIT-RAPPING

could alter the damning proof, publicly exhibited by Margaretta Fox, of the manner in which the raps were produced.

In their confession the Fox sisters declared that they were led into the fraud by their elder sister, Leah Fox Underhill (formerly Mrs. Fish), whose little girl, as we have seen, first discovered how to produce the raps. On October 15, 1888, they authorized Mr. R. B. Davenport to write their confession, and it was published as *A Death-blow to Spiritualism*. The Fox girls, like Slade, were confirmed inebriates—Slade had been confined in an asylum for inebriates—fell into great poverty, and eventually returned to Spiritualism. Their old followers were the only persons who would assist them. After an interview with Mr. Newton, the millionaire Spiritist, they recanted their confession, but they never recovered their old success. They remained victims of the drink habit, and ultimately died in great want.

So the plain fact emerges that the trickery of a little girl was the means of launching this gigantic fraud which overran America, and ultimately the world, reaching its culminating point in the rank jungle-growths of superstition, as illustrated by the physical phenomena of the dark *séance* !

It may be as well to deal here with the phenomena of table-turning. Most of us have met people who have taken part in table-turning, and who assure us that the table really did move without any pressure being exerted through the hands resting on the table.

Table-turning became very popular in England in 1853. It was introduced from the Continent, where it had broken out in the previous year. The usual method adopted was for a number of people to seat themselves at a round table, upon the edge of which they rested their fingers, spread out so that the little fingers of neighbouring sitters were in contact. After a certain period of waiting the table would execute various movements which appeared to be independent of the volition of the people concerned.

The table-turning mania reached such dimensions that several scientific men turned their attention to it. A committee of four medical men made an investigation, and, says Mr. Podmore, "they found, as the result of several trials, that when no expectations were formed of any probable result, and the attention of those sitting round the table was diverted by conversation or otherwise, the table did not move at all. Again, no results followed when half the sitters expected the rotation to take place in one direction and half in another. But when expectation was allowed free play, and especially if the direction of the probable movement was indicated beforehand, the table began to rotate after a few minutes, although no one of the sitters was conscious of exercising any effort at all. The conclusion formed was that the motion was due to muscular action, mostly exercised unconsciously."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Braid, who also investigated the subject, declared that at "all the experiments at which he

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 8.



had assisted some one had always announced beforehand the direction in which the table might be expected to move, and had thus helped to bring the unconscious expectations of the sitters into unison."

But this was too simple an explanation of the mystery to commend itself to the multitude, who revel in the mysterious and unexplainable. The Spiritualistic interpretation found its strongest advocates among the clergy, who declared that the tables were tilted by diabolic agency.

The Rev. N. S. Godfrey, a Church of England clergyman in Leeds, held, with his wife and his curate, a meeting for table-turning in the presence of the National schoolmaster and others. After recording various unsuccessful attempts to induce the table to confess that it was moved by diabolic agency, Mr. Godfrey continues:—

I was now prepared for a further experiment of a far more solemn character. I whispered to the schoolmaster to bring a small Bible, and to lay it on the table when I should tell him. I then caused the table to revolve rapidly, and gave the signal. *The Bible* was laid on the table, and it instantly stopped! We were horror-struck.

"After supper the experiment was resumed, and the following test was tried: 'If there be not a devil, knock twice. To our horror, the leg slowly rose and knocked twice.' It need hardly be said that these appalling disclosures were made public without delay."<sup>1</sup>

Later, at another *séance*, the "table admitted, in

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 13.

answer to leading questions, that it was moved by the spirit of a dead man, a lost soul, sent from hell by the devil, for the express purpose of deceiving the circle there assembled, and doomed to return to hell when the nightly task was accomplished." Later still, the spirit of a deceased parishioner appeared on the scene. "This spirit confessed that he had only once before been in the school-room (where the *séance* was held), and then not to attend Sunday-school, but for the carnal delights of a tea-meeting. In earth life he had generally attended the Wesleyan chapel, but now deeply regretted he had not paid more heed to Mr. Godfrey's counsel."

"The inconceivable Godfrey," as Mr. Podmore calls him, published alarming revelations under the titles *Table-Moving Tested, and Proved to be the Result of Satanic Agency* (1853), and *Table-Turning the Devil's Masterpiece*; also *The Devil's Modern Masterpiece*.

Later in the year the Rev. E. Gillson, of Bath, after *one* sitting, published his experiences under the title of *Table-Talking: Disclosures of Satanic Wonders and Prophetic Signs*. Mr. Gillson, at this sitting, got into communication with a departed spirit "who expected in the course of ten years to be bound with Satan and all his crew, and cast into the abyss." Another clergyman, the Rev. R. W. Dibdin, in a lecture delivered in the same year (1853) and afterwards printed, contended that the spirits at

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, vol. ii, p. 13.

## 22 THE FOX SISTERS AND SPIRIT-RAPPING

work were not those of departed men and women, but those of devils. "But whether spirits of men or devils," says Podmore, "all these clergymen were agreed that the motive power and the aim were alike diabolic."<sup>1</sup>

It was Faraday who destroyed this rank growth of superstition by the method of scientific experiment, and we cannot do better than reproduce Mr. Podmore's account of the tests and their results:—

Faraday, like other thoughtful men, was aghast at the hold which the table-turning mania had gained on all classes of society, and at the loose thinking and presumptuous ignorance which the popular explanations revealed. Among the various theories commonly offered to account for the movements of the table he mentions spirits, electricity, magnetism, "attraction" of some kind, and the rotation of the earth! By the use of some apparatus Faraday showed conclusively that the movements were due to muscular action, and to that alone, exercised in most cases without the consciousness or volition of the sitters. Perhaps the most effective of his test apparatus was the following. He prepared two small flat boards a few inches square, placed several glass rollers about the thickness of an ordinary pencil between them, and fastened the whole together with a couple of indiarubber bands in such a manner that the upper board would slide under lateral pressure to a limited extent over the lower one. A light index, consisting of a haystalk or a piece of paper, was fastened to the apparatus so as to betray the least movement of the upper board to the lower one. It was found that in all cases the upper board moved before the lower board, which rested on the table, showing that the fingers of the operator moved the

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 14.



table, and not—as the sitters themselves supposed—the table the fingers. But the most striking proof that the movement was due to a muscular effort of which the performer was quite unconscious is that when the sitters learned the meaning of the index, and kept their attention fixed upon it, no movement followed. “When the parties saw the index, it remained very steady; when it was hidden from them, or they looked away from it, it wavered about, though they believed that they always pressed directly downward.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus did science give the death-blow to this childish superstition. The public excitement on the subject quickly died down, and thenceforward the practice was confined solely to Spiritualistic circles, where it still continues a languid existence. It would be utterly incredible that a man of such scientific eminence as Sir Oliver Lodge should believe in this superstition, and practise it to get into communication with the spirits of the dead, if we did not have his own word for it. In *Raymond* Sir Oliver gives pages and pages of communications from spirits obtained by this means. Chapter VIII is entirely taken up with them; and there are many others.

Dr. Ivor Tuckett, who has himself experimented on the subject, says that the conditions for success in table-turning are chiefly three: (a) that there should be no one taking part who is profoundly sceptical; (b) that some one, usually of a neurotic temperament, should be a convinced believer in the “spiritual explanation” of table-turning; (c) that

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, vol. ii, p. 9.

## 24 THE FOX SISTERS AND SPIRIT-RAPPING

the performance should be carried out in a dim light. These are the ideal conditions. Dr. Tuckett also gives the rational explanation of the phenomena, as follows: "After a few or many minutes of sitting with outstretched fingers, one or more of the sitters will become the subject of fatigue of the neuromuscular system, encouraged by the expectancy of phenomena and by the concentration of attention not to miss the moment the table begins to move. This fatigue leads to a certain degree of tremor in the hands, and probably evinces itself first in those who are the most intense believers, especially if they are of a neurotic temperament—that is, have a nervous system easily excited and depressed. As the finger-tips are fixed by contact with the table, the tremor gives the feeling that the table is vibrating, and, in the belief that it is about to move, the enthusiasts quite subconsciously push the table. The moment the table moves ever so little, the whole company, including the least enthusiastic, become the subjects of a process of auto-suggestion, and aid the deception quite unconsciously by pushing. If, however, a profound sceptic is present, he will not be the victim of this auto-hypnotic process, and by not doing his share of the pushing, or by withstanding the tendency of the table to move, which is very slight at first, he will defeat the action of the others."<sup>1</sup>

From this it is easy to understand why mediums always object to sceptics joining their circles.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ivor Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural* (1911), p. 82.

## CHAPTER III

### SLADE AND SPIRIT WRITING

There are, indeed, always to be found some who are fond of dwelling on instances of the marvellous, as if opening a door to the supernatural; and others who, perhaps confusedly and inadvertently, use language to the effect that we are surrounded by wonders and miracles, inscrutable to our faculties. But, as before observed, there are no real mysteries in nature: what is to-day a miracle may become a well-known phenomenon, subject to law, to-morrow; and assuredly will eventually be so if inductive inquiry be steadily carried out. The supernatural continually recedes and disappears from our view, and the dominion of nature, order, intelligence, daily advances.—PROFESSOR BADEN POWELL, *The Order of Nature* (1859), p. 473.

THERE is a multitude of books, full of accounts of the physical phenomena of Spiritualism, to which Spiritualists refer any one who demands proofs of the phenomena. Like the age of miracles, the age of such physical phenomena—table-rapping, levitation, spirit materialization, etc.—is past; or, if they still appear, their manifestations are confined to exceedingly private circles, far from the inquisitive eye of the investigator and the sceptic. We shall soon see why.

One of the most famous mediums was Slade. “Dr.” Slade, as he called himself, was an American. In the middle of July, 1876, “Dr.” Henry Slade came to London. His fame had preceded him, and he was warmly welcomed by leading Spiritualists. Slade made a great sensation. Several men of

science who visited him were unable to explain the mysteries they had witnessed. They were even discussed by that august body, the British Association, at their meeting in that year, and "Lord Rayleigh mentioned that he had gone to Slade in company with a professional conjurer, who had admitted that he was completely puzzled."<sup>1</sup> This was because the tricks were new, and not the usual stock-in-trade of the professional conjurers. Slade professed to receive messages from the spirits, written on slates. Slade would hold a slate under the table for a time, and when produced it would be found to bear a message.

Slade's triumphant career, however, did not last long. A few days after the British Association meeting, Professor (now Sir) Ray Lankester and Dr. Donkin visited Slade, and, having satisfied themselves at a previous visit of Slade's method, "Professor Lankester put his hypothesis to the test by snatching the slate out of Slade's hand before the ostensible sound of writing was heard, at a time when, presumably, therefore, the spirits had not begun to write. As he anticipated, he found the message already written."<sup>2</sup> Sir Ray Lankester prosecuted Slade for fraud. "The trial," says Mr. Maskelyne, "took place at Bow Street, and lasted several days. I was called as an expert, and performed the tricks in the witness-box. The result was that Slade was sentenced to three months' hard labour. An appeal was made against the magistrate's decision, which

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, vol. ii, p. 89.

was quashed owing to a technical flaw in the indictment. New summonses were at once taken out, but Slade and his manager, Simmons—both Yankees—made tracks for the Continent before the summons could be served.”<sup>1</sup>

The technical flaw in the indictment was merely the omission of the words “by palmistry or otherwise,” which appeared in the statute. A good instance of legal red-tape.

Slade was no fool. Maskelyne said, in the witness-box, that it took him several weeks’ hard work to imitate Slade’s tricks. He had, moreover, a front of brass; for, notwithstanding his ignominious defeat and flight from England, we find him during the following year (1877) in Germany, where he gained his greatest triumph. At Leipsic, Professor Zollner, with the assistance of Professors Scheibner, Fechner, Weber, and Wundt, undertook an inquiry into the phenomena in the presence of Slade. So assured was Zollner that Slade’s tricks were the works of spirits that he made them the foundation of his book, *Transcendental Physics*.

One of Zollner’s colleagues, a Professor of Surgery in the University of Leipsic, made a bet with Zollner that a slate carefully sealed and watched by himself could not be written upon by spirits. He had left the slate in Professor Zollner’s hands, in the confidence that the latter would use all the necessary precautions, says Dr. Paul Carus. “Professor Zollner, however, not finding Mr. Slade at home,

<sup>1</sup> Maskelyne, *The Supernatural*, p. 195.



saw nothing wrong in leaving the sealed slate at the medium's residence, and thus allowing it to pass for an indefinite time out of his own control, thinking that the seals were a sufficient protection. It goes without saying that his colleague at once cancelled the bet, and took no more interest in the experiment."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Carl Willmann, of Hamburg, a manufacturer of magical apparatus and the author of several books on modern magic, gives a circumstantial account of Zollner's double slates used in *séances* with Slade. These slates are now in the possession of Dr. Borchardt, of Hamburg, who bought them after Zollner's decease. "To a superficial inspection they appear unbroken, but the sealing-wax shows vestiges of finger marks, and Mr. Willmann has not the slightest doubt that they were opened underneath the seal with a thin heated wire, and that the seal was afterwards again attached to its place."<sup>2</sup>

Slade also had the audacity to produce foot and hand prints of the spirits. These were probably made from rubber or celluloid impressions carried in his pockets. "Mr. Willmann calls attention to the fact that the footprints as published by Professor Zollner were made from feet whose stockings had been removed but a few moments before, for they still show the meshes of the knitting, which quickly disappear as soon as the skin of the foot grows cold. Professor Zollner did not see

<sup>1</sup> Carus, "The Old and the New Magic," *The Open Court* (June, 1900), p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

such trifles, and yet they are important, even if it were for the mere purpose of determining whether the spirits wear stockings made in Germany or America.”<sup>1</sup>

Zollner had two rings turned from the solid wood, and brought them to Slade to get them linked together by spiritual power. Of course, he did not do it. What happened was that, at the conclusion of a *séance*, “the two wooden rings, or two others like them, were found strung on the leg of a table, which it does not appear that Zollner—he was alone with the medium—had examined before the *séance*.”<sup>2</sup> Other tests, such as reversing the spiral in a snail-shell and introducing a piece of paraffin wax into a hollow bulb of blown glass, were evaded or declined altogether.

However, the report of Zollner, backed by his colleagues, carried so much weight that the Seybert Commission—so called after Mr. Henry Seybert, who left a sum of money to the University of Pennsylvania for the investigation of Spiritualism—sent Professor Fullerton, the secretary, over to investigate the subject. In a summary of his conclusions Professor Fullerton says :—

Thus it would appear that, of the four eminent men whose names have made famous the investigation, there is reason to believe one, *Zollner*, was of unsound mind at the time, and anxious for experimental verification of an already accepted hypothesis; another, *Fechner*, was partly blind, and believed because of Zollner’s observations; a third, *Scheibner*,

<sup>1</sup> Carus, *The Open Court* (June, 1900), p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 193.

was also afflicted with defective vision, and not entirely satisfied in his own mind as to the phenomena; and a fourth, *Weber*, was advanced in age, and did not even recognize the disabilities of his associates. No one of these men had ever before had experience of this sort; nor was any one of them acquainted with the ordinary possibilities of deception. The experience of our Commission with Dr. Slade would suggest that the lack of such knowledge on their part was unfortunate.<sup>1</sup>

In *The Open Court* for June, 1900, there is a picture of Zollner and Slade seated at a small table; Zollner bowed down, nearly bald, and bespectacled. Slade is a fine vigorous man in the prime of life, gazing intently at Zollner. It is a case of the spider and the fly. Zollner and his colleagues were helpless in the grip of this wily charlatan.

A few years later Slade met his Waterloo at the hands of Mr. Truesdell, an American who, in a *séance* with Slade, detected him using his foot to simulate a spirit hand. Truesdell's book (*Spiritualism: Bottom Facts*) contains, says Mr. Hereward Carrington, "the most conclusive evidence of fraud."

"Here we read," says Mr. Carrington, "that the author (Truesdell) detected Slade producing 'telekinetic' (action at a distance) phenomena with his foot (p. 145); that he saw the movements of the tendons in Slade's wrists when he (Slade) was doing the writing (p. 146); that, by purposely leaving a forged letter in his overcoat pocket, he thereby deceived Slade—receiving messages from the supposedly dead friends of this non-existent person (pp. 150–51); he tells how he discovered a slate in

<sup>1</sup> Maskelyne, *The Supernatural*, p. 209.



the corner of the medium's *séance* room containing a message *already written out*, waiting for some future sitter to receive it (p. 151); and how, finally, Slade made a full confession to him, evidently stating, under bond of secrecy, exactly how all his manifestations were produced (pp. 156-57). This confession is most remarkable, and is apparently little known, though it was not the only one that he made. Mr. Furness stated to the Seybert Commission (p. 70) that when he last saw Slade, in Boston, 'he eagerly beckoned me to come in, and, as I settled myself in a chair, I said to him: "Well, and how are the old spirits coming on?" Whereupon he replied: "Oh, pshaw! you never believed in them, did you?"'"<sup>1</sup>

What Mr. Carrington describes as "one of the most amusing passages in the whole history of the subject" is that in which Truesdell describes the trick he played on Slade—by which this clever trickster was himself tricked. Finding the slate with the prepared message, as already mentioned, Truesdell wrote under the first message the words:—

*Henry! look out for this fellow; he is up to snuff!*  
—Alcinda.

Alcinda was Slade's deceased wife. Soon after this was done Slade appeared, and the *séance* commenced. The spirits could be heard writing on the slate held by Slade; "even the crossing of the 't's' and the dotting of the 'i's' could be easily distinguished." There we were, says Truesdell with inimitable irony, "face to face, as it were, with our spirit friends, communicating with them as in earth

<sup>1</sup> Hereward Carrington, *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, pp. 21-22.

life, with the unimpeachable testimony of our eyes and ears to establish the fact. At the conclusion of the writing the Doctor raised the slate and turned it over in a triumphant manner, when his eyes fell upon the *two* messages. He seemed appalled! Had a thunderbolt from heaven fallen at his feet he could not have been more astonished. For several minutes he continued to gaze upon the slate in blank amazement; then, suddenly turning to me, his countenance livid with rage and excitement, he exclaimed: 'What does this mean? Who has been meddling with this slate?' 'Spirits,' I coolly replied. A moment later this manipulator of unseen forces was as mellow as a ripe apple. Full and freely we conversed together for an hour or more upon the all-important subject of my visit. If I had heretofore been suspicious of the Doctor, now every shadow of doubt was expelled! The science of Spiritualism was more thoroughly discussed between us than I had ever before heard it, the Doctor taking especial pains to explain to me many of the mysterious methods adopted by the spirits in order to reach those who are yet in the physical form.....And so on, with delightful irony."<sup>1</sup>

Slade, like the Fox girls and many other mediums, took to drink. The end of his career came in 1894, according to the *English Illustrated Magazine* (January, 1895), where we read: "The famous 'Dr. Slade,' who created such excitement in London

<sup>1</sup> Hereward Carrington, *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, p. 23; citing from Truesdell's *Spiritualism: Bottom Facts*, pp. 156-57.

in 1876 and made so much money with his slate writing, was recently taken to a workhouse in America, penniless, friendless, and a lunatic." The only spirits he was really acquainted with were those in the bottle ; and they were his ruin.

## CHAPTER IV

### D. D. HOME : "THE NAPOLEON OF THE MEDIUMS"

Turning now for the moment to the historical side of this question, we find that there is scarcely a medium producing physical phenomena who has not at one time or another been exposed in the grossest kind of fraud, and that the whole history of the subject—so far as the physical phenomena are concerned—is battered with evidences of fraud and the worst "moral mud" and intellectual mire imaginable! It presents an almost unbroken chain of evidence, showing that fraud and nothing but fraud has been practised throughout by mediums, and presenting scarcely any evidence whatever that they are ever genuine or did really happen as stated. — HEReward CARRINGTON, *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, p. 6.

DANIEL DUNGLAS HOME was the cleverest and most gifted of all the mediums. It is the standing boast of Spiritualists that Home was never caught practising trickery and fraud. Home was the very Napoleon of mediums. He hobnobbed with princes, kings, and emperors; he held several *séances* at the Tuilleries with the last Emperor and Empress of the French, also with the Czar at the Russian Court, and many other royal and noble families. He succeeded in marrying the young and charming daughter of a noble Russian family, possessed of a moderate fortune; and after she died he married another Russian lady, also possessed of a fortune.

These marriages made him independent of the spirits, and he rarely disturbed them to fetch and carry for him.

Home appears to provide the only recorded case of a medium who rose from poverty to wealth, and maintained his prosperity to the end; most of the others ended miserably, like Slade, victims of drink.

Home's only serious fall happened when he had to disgorge a sum of £24,000 bestowed upon him by Mrs. Lyons, a wealthy widow, who changed her mind a few months later and brought an action for recovery. Even the late Mr. Andrew Lang, who was more than a half-believer in Home, admits: “The judge held, and, I think, rightly held, that the gift was prompted, at least to some extent, by what Home declared to be spiritual rappings. That quite destroys his moral character, as far as this case went.”<sup>1</sup>

“It seems certain,” says Mr. Podmore, “that Home began life in extreme poverty, and probably as an illegitimate child. From the age of seventeen onwards he lived by the exercise of his mediumship, nonetheless, if he ever actually received payment in cash down. Throughout his life, first in the Eastern States of America and later in every country of Europe, he found wealthy patrons to welcome him.....When Home was not actually a guest in their houses, his patrons, in one way or other—by taking tickets for his lectures, by commis-

<sup>1</sup> Lang, “Historical Mysteries,” *Cornhill Magazine*, April, 1904.

sioning busts from him, by subscribing to pay his debts, by making him presents of costly jewellery—managed to provide for his wants.”<sup>1</sup> Thus Home lived not merely in comfort; “he lived in what is commonly called the ‘best’ society—the society of persons of rank, wealth, and fashion, and occasionally of intellectual distinction.”

Home is described as having been “slight, fair, and, without being actually handsome, attractive and even distinguished looking.” He “produced on most persons the impression of a highly emotional, child-like nature, full of generous impulses, and lavish of affection to all comers.....he was a good performer on the piano; and his recitations, whether in the drawing-room or on the platform, are said by competent judges to have been distinguished by brilliant dramatic faculty and emotional expression. Even on those who were brought only into momentary contact with him he produced commonly the impression of frankness and sincerity; in those who stood in more frequent and intimate relations with him the confidence which he inspired seems to have been unlimited. The belief in the honesty of the performer became for them hardly less instinctive than the belief in the trustworthiness of the senses which took note of the performance. The trust upon which other mediums relied was built up mainly by adventitious devices; with Home it was inspired and maintained by the charm of his personality. But there were two other causes which

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 226.



contributed in no small degree to the confidence felt in Home's integrity. Home himself professed a fervent belief in his own mission as a teacher of the truth of immortality; and in his trances habitually delivered discourses on religious themes."<sup>1</sup>

I have no doubt that Home had a genuine belief in Spiritualism. When nine years of age he was taken to America by an aunt; about five years later the spirit-rapping epidemic—started by the Fox sisters—broke out in America, and proved the starting point of modern Spiritualism. Home was infected with the belief, and two years later, at the age of seventeen, left his aunt's house, and went out into the world to live by his wits.

Home's success was due mainly to two causes: first, the manner in which he inspired people with a belief in his honesty and sincerity, thus putting their critical faculties to sleep; and, second, to the fact that he did not come in the guise of a common paid professional, but as an honoured guest, not to be spied upon and suspected.

It should be borne in mind, as Mr. Podmore points out, that "none of Home's manifestations seem to have been peculiar to himself. At the outset of his career, indeed, he appears to have won no special distinction as a medium. Raps were heard at his *séances*; tables and chairs were moved about; the room was shaken; bells, accordions, and guitars were played under the table, or even at a distance from the circle, with no hand near them; spirit

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, pp. 228-29.

voices would speak through the medium ; spirit hands were felt under the table-cloth, and occasionally seen above it ; spirit lights made themselves visible, and the medium himself would be levitated. But all these performances were the common property of the guild. The Fox girls, Gordon, Cooley, E. P. Fowler, Abbey Warner, and even Willis, the Harvard divinity student, were Home's rivals, and apparently, in the estimation of his contemporaries, at least his equals in all these feats. It is noteworthy that Home appears to have attracted comparatively little attention in the American Press before his journey to England."<sup>1</sup>

We have always been taught to believe that spiritual intelligence far transcends in knowledge and power the limited intelligence of poor, earthly, material man. To the spirits all knowledge is an open book ; nothing is hidden from them either in the illimitable ages of past time or in the equally illimitable ages of the future ; for do they not, so Spiritualists claim, sometimes warn their earthly friends of coming danger ? If the spirits are indeed so marvellously gifted, how can we explain their actions when they condescend to appear at a spiritualistic *séance* ? With the shifting of tables and chairs like furniture removers, playing the accordion like an itinerant Italian, or the guitar like a nigger minstrel, plucking dresses and coats with spiritual hands, raising the medium in the air like a professional strong man, and all the other stupid and

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 231.

senseless tricks performed at a Spiritualistic *séance*, it is evident that these spirits, since leaving their human habitations, have, instead of gaining the enormous intellectual power claimed for them, degenerated into childish imbecility.

However, there is no need for any intervention of spirits to account for these hooligan antics. We know perfectly well how they are manipulated; and, although Home was never publicly exposed, we know, from the exposure of others, how the tricks were done.

Take, for instance, the playing of the accordion and the guitar, which was a common feature of Home's *séances*. Mr. Hereward Carrington, who has made a life study of the subject and is a member of the Society for Psychical Research and also of the American Society for Scientific Research, explains the trick as follows: The guitar is prepared beforehand with a hole in the neck for the insertion of the lazy-tongs—as they are called in America—a lattice-work contrivance of steel, which, when extended, reaches out several feet, and will close up to a few inches. "Inside the guitar, which is specially constructed, is a small music-box, which may be wound up and set in motion by merely releasing a catch-spring. When the *séance* is in full swing the medium gains possession of the guitar, inserts the rod in the hole in the neck of the instrument, sets the machinery going, and waves the guitar over the sitters' heads, when they will have presented to them the strange phenomenon of a guitar floating in the air and performing a tune upon itself! It

does not sound exactly as though the music were produced on the strings, but it is near enough for the illusion to pass, in the circumstances. At any rate, the music has never been challenged, to my knowledge."<sup>1</sup> The obvious reply of the medium to such a challenge would be that spirit music could not be expected to sound the same as an instrument played by human hands.

That this was the method of producing music practised by Home is confirmed by a perusal of his autobiographical work, *Incidents in My Life*, where we learn the titles of the pieces played—namely, "God Save the Queen," "Home, Sweet Home," and "The Last Rose of Summer"<sup>2</sup>—the very tunes found in small music-boxes.

The medium Monck also used a music-box at his *séances*. Says Mr. Carrington: "He would place a music-box on the table, and cover it with a cigar-box, or other box, and the sitters were at liberty to keep their hands upon this throughout the sitting. Nevertheless, the music-box played at command, though the box and table could be examined, and the medium's hands were held. This effect was produced by the aid of a *second* music-box, playing the same airs as the first, and attached to the leg of the medium, just above the bend of the knee, within the trouser. When not in use the box rested beneath the knee, but when required for action it was brought around to the front of the leg, resting

<sup>1</sup> Carrington, *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> Home, *Incidents in My Life* (1863), pp. 145-86. Also vol. ii (Second Series; 1872), p. 121.

above the knee. The box was so arranged that pressure on a stud at the top caused it to play, the music immediately ceasing when such pressure was removed. Of course, the box on the top of the table is silent throughout, the music being under the perfect control of the medium."<sup>1</sup> Holding the medium's hands would make no difference, for he only had to press the stud on the top of the music-box against the under-side of the table to start the mechanism; and when the pressure was removed it would stop.

Sir William Crookes, the famous physicist, gives in his *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* an account of how he, along with his brother, Dr. Huggins, and Sergeant Cox, tested Home's power of producing music from an accordion without touching the keys. He comes to the conclusion that Home succeeded under the test. But the man who suffered himself to be hoodwinked by such common adventuresses as Annie Fay and Florrie Cook was not likely to detect the imposture of the astute and tricky Home.

To make the test, Mr. Crookes, as he then was, constructed a round topless and bottomless cage with wooden hoops and insulated copper wire. "The height of this cage," says Mr. Crookes, "was such that it would just slip under my dining-table, but be too close to the top to allow of the hand being introduced into the interior, or to admit of a foot being pushed underneath it." Mr. Home

<sup>1</sup> Carrington, *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, p. 199.



was to get music from an accordion, newly purchased by Mr. Crookes, while holding it by one hand in this cage under the table.

Mr. J. M. Robertson, under the title "A Spiritualistic Farce," subjected this test to a drastic criticism. He says:—

Observe, while Mr. Crookes carefully arranges a cage which shall just fit under his table and leave no room for a hand, Mr. Home is actually allowed to keep the edge of the cage a little beyond the side of the table and put his hand in freely, holding the accordion by the bottom, so that the key end hung downward. The illustrative woodcut given by Mr. Crookes shows this. The table, then, played no part whatever as a test and the adjustment of the cage's height was a pure blind or a pure irrelevance. If Mr. Home was going to employ a new force under scientific conditions, there was no need for the table at all. He might much more convincingly have done it in the open. The investigators saw that he had placed his other hand on the table, and they held his feet. All these checks could have been better employed if they had sat in a free space with the accordion in the middle.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, under these conditions, the accordion moved and played; but Mr. Crookes states that when, after a time, Home removed his hand from the cage, the accordion still continued to play. After a very careful analysis of Mr. Crookes's statement of the proceedings, which is too long to quote here, Mr. Robertson further points out: "In all this narrative there is not a grain of scientific proof that the sounds heard really came *from the accordion*

<sup>1</sup> *National Reformer*, September 20, 1891.



*under notice.* It is a well-established scientific fact that it is often extremely difficult to fix with accuracy the locality of the source of sounds. This has been brought home by ocular demonstration to thousands of people at the entertainments of Mr. Stuart Cumberland, who got persons from his audience to submit to be blindfolded on his platform, while he clicked coins in various positions near them. When I saw the performance none of the blindfolded persons ever came near guessing where the sounds had been made; and the miscalculations were generally astonishing. A sound visibly produced at a blindfolded man's knee would be supposed by him to come from behind his head, or from some way off. Now, in the case of Mr. Crookes's accordion experiment, the whole explanation may perfectly well turn upon this. There may be, for all I know, plenty of ways of playing tricks with accordions; but I have here simply to point out that Mr. Crookes, a so-called scientific man, did not take a single precaution against this notorious form of hallucination, or against the many possible tricks by which sounds like those of an accordion could be played near at hand while attention was concentrated on the one that was visible.....It is needless to ascertain what was the particular device by which Mr. Home got another accordion played near at hand, or produced notes like those of an accordion (the investigators were evidently not anxious to ascertain the quality or timbre of the particular notes heard) from some machine about his person. He may have done the whole thing by

one of those little instruments which I believe are sometimes called 'mouth accordions.' The fact that his instrument was 'generally an accordion, for convenience of portability,' as if there was any want of portability about a violin or a cornet, need hardly be dwelt upon."

Moreover, Mr. Crookes was physically quite unfitted to make such an investigation. As Mr. Edward Clodd tells us, the late Sir William Ramsay said that Sir William Crookes is "so shortsighted that, despite his unquestioned honesty, he cannot be trusted in what he tells you he has seen."<sup>1</sup>

We are dealing at some length with Home because, as Mr. Podmore says, "in Home and in his doings all the problems of Spiritualism are posed in their acutest form; with the marvels wrought by or through him the main defences of Spiritualism must stand or fall."<sup>2</sup>

In 1871 Mr. Crookes (later Sir William) announced that he had succeeded in demonstrating the existence of a hitherto unknown force, and had measured the effects produced. Again through the medium of Daniel Dunglas Home. An apparatus was constructed that would register alterations in the weight of a body; it was described as "a mahogany board, 36 inches long, by 9½ inches wide, and 1 inch thick. At each end a strip of mahogany 1½ inches wide was screwed on, forming feet. One end of the board rested on a firm table, while the other end was supported by a spring balance hanging from

<sup>1</sup> Edward Clodd, *The Question* (1917), p. 100.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 223.

a substantial tripod stand. The balance was fitted with a self-registering index in such a manner that it would record the maximum weight indicated by the pointer. The apparatus was adjusted so that the mahogany board was horizontal, its foot resting flat on the support. In this position its weight was 3 lbs., as marked by the pointer of the balance. Before Mr. Home entered the room the apparatus had been arranged in position, and he had not even the objects of some parts explained before sitting down."<sup>1</sup>

Besides Mr. Crookes, four other persons were present, including Dr. (later Sir William) Huggins and Serjeant Cox, who afterwards attested the accuracy of his report.

After some preliminary operations with an accordion, attention was turned to the apparatus, Mr. Home placing his fingers lightly upon the extreme end of the board furthest from the balance, Dr. Huggins and Mr. Crookes sitting on each side and watching. The index of the balance moved several times, the greatest downward pull registered being 6 lbs.; the index, of course, showing a *total* weight of 9 lbs., as 3 lbs., the weight of the board, was already registered. The investigators declare that at no time were Home's fingers advanced more than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches over the end of the board—that is, the width of the strip forming the feet, by which the end rested on the table.

The few scientific men who criticized the experiment contented themselves with pointing out

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol ii, p. 237.

possible defects in the apparatus employed. Professor Balfour Stewart and Mr. E. B. Tylor suggested that the investigators might be under the influence of mesmeric illusions produced by Home on the minds of sensitive spectators. This was explaining one marvel by another quite as marvellous. But, as Mr. Podmore points out, there was no need for such a drastic solution. To begin with, we are told that all present guarded Home's feet and hands; but, as he further observes—

It is pertinent to point out that a duty for which the whole company were collectively responsible may well at times have been intermitted. Moreover, Dr. Huggins and Mr. Crookes had to take notes. Again, the experiment described was not the first of its kind: it occurred in the middle of a long series. It is, indeed, stated that Home was not familiar with the apparatus employed. But as similar apparatus had been employed probably at previous trials by Mr. Crookes himself, certainly by earlier investigators—among them Dr. Hare, with whose published writings on Spiritualism we cannot assume that Home was unacquainted—the statement carries little weight. Further—a point of capital importance—there had apparently been many previous trials with various modifications of the apparatus, and many failures; in Mr. Crookes's own words, "the experiments I have tried have been very numerous, but, owing to our imperfect knowledge of the conditions which favour or oppose the manifestations of this force, to the apparently capricious manner in which it is exerted, and to the fact that Mr. Home himself is subject to unaccountable ebbs and flows of the force, it has seldom happened that a result obtained on one occasion could be subsequently confirmed and tested with apparatus specially contrived for the purpose."

The real significance of this statement is that Home—a practised conjurer, as we are entitled to assume—was in a position to dictate the conditions of the experiment. By the simple device of doing nothing when the conditions were unfavourable he could ensure that the light (gas in the present instance) was such, and so placed, the apparatus so contrived, and the sitters so disposed, as to suit his purpose, and that in the actual experiment the attention of the investigators would necessarily be concentrated on the wrong points. Under such conditions, as ordinary experience shows, and as experiments described in the last chapter have abundantly demonstrated, five untrained observers are no match for one clever conjurer.

The word "untrained" in this connection may seem to require justification. Of Sir William Crookes's high distinction in many branches of physical science there is no need to speak here. But his previous training did not necessarily render him better qualified to deal with problems differing widely from those presented in the laboratory. To put it bluntly, if Home was a conjurer, Mr. Crookes was probably in no better position for detecting the sleight-of-hand than any other man his equal in intelligence and native acuteness of sense. Possibly in a worse position; for it may be argued that his previous training would prepare the way for Home's efforts to concentrate attention on the mechanical apparatus, and thus divert it from the seemingly irrelevant movements by which it may be conjectured the conjurer's end was attained.<sup>1</sup>

As to the actual means employed by Home to move the index of the balance down, Mr. Podmore has no doubt that Home accomplished the trick by passing the loop of a fine black thread over the hook

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, pp. 239-40.



of the balance, the other end being attached to his clothes—probably at the knee. Mr. Podmore points out that the amount of light in the room during the experiment is not stated, but that, at a similar experiment given a few weeks later, "the light, by Home's order, was so diminished that at the first trial 'there was scarcely light enough to see the board and the index move.'"<sup>1</sup> Under these conditions a black thread would be quite invisible.

Mr. Podmore also thinks that Home used fine black thread to support the floating lath in the air, and to prevent small objects from sliding off a tilted table. Mr. Davey, who surpassed the mediums in their tricks and beat them at their own game, employed a hair or thread to move bits of coloured chalk under a glass tumbler, when the eyes of all present were concentrated upon the spot. By similar means he would even cause a tumbler to glide across the table. As we shall see later on, it was a black thread that the notorious Eusapia Palladino, the medium who tricked so many famous scientists, including Sir Oliver Lodge, operated on the letter balance.

In cases where exceedingly small masses have to be weighed, the balance is used in a vacuum, in order to do away with the pressure of the air. It is placed in a glass vessel and the air extracted by means of an air-pump. As a chemist, Sir William Crookes was well acquainted with this apparatus, and if he wanted a real test of this spiritual force

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, vol. ii, p. 241.



why did he not ask Home to move the balance when it was enclosed in a vacuum? Perhaps he did, and thus led up to one of the many failures of which he says: "It has seldom happened that a result obtained on one occasion could be subsequently confirmed and tested with apparatus specially contrived for the purpose."

To deal with all the phenomena produced by Home at his *séances* would take an unconscionable time, but the reader may be referred to Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism* for further details. The performance which has made perhaps the greatest impression, owing to the high social position of the witnesses, is the account given by the Master of Lindsay (afterwards Earl of Crawford) of how Home, in the presence of himself, Viscount Adare, and Captain Wynne, floated out of the window of one room and in at the window of another room seven feet away, eighty-five feet from the ground.

Now, first of all, there was no light in the room. The Master of Lindsay says that the moon was shining full into the room, but the value of this statement may be gauged by the fact, pointed out by Mr. Podmore, that on the date given the moon was *only two days old*. Therefore there could not have been much illumination from that source, even were it a cloudless night. Further, the Master of Lindsay was seated with his back to the window; so he could not possibly see Home float into the room. Lastly, no one saw Home float out of the window of the first room, as all the observers were seated at a table in the second room. What happened was

this: According to Lord Lindsay, Home went into a trance, and walked out into the hall. The Master of Lindsay then heard a voice whisper: "He will go out of one window and in at another." He repeated this to his companions. They heard the window of the next room open. Then the Master of Lindsay, sitting with his back to the window, saw the shadow of Home on the wall in front of him, and found Home was in the room.<sup>1</sup> Probably it was not Home at all who entered the first room and made the noise of opening the window. No doubt Home, under cover of darkness, had regained admission to the second room, perhaps by another door, and was concealed by the window curtains, so that he could make his appearance at the appropriate moment. This trick had been prepared and worked up beforehand. As Podmore points out: "A few days before, in the presence of two of the same witnesses, Home had opened the same window, stepped on the ledge outside, and remained standing there, to the great alarm of Lord Lindsay, looking down at the street some eighty feet below. The medium had thus, as it were, furnished a rough sketch of the picture which he aimed at producing."<sup>2</sup> Lord Lindsay himself was subject to hallucinations. At an earlier period of the same evening he had "seen an apparition of a man sitting in a chair." As for the titles and social distinction of the witnesses, they carry no weight in investigations

<sup>1</sup> See the two accounts given in Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, pp. 255-56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

of this nature. One Maskelyne at a *séance* would penetrate more mysteries than could the entire House of Lords.

Then there was the feat of handling red-hot coals out of the fire. This, like the floating in the air and elongations of the body, "was only vouchsafed," says Podmore, "to a few privileged and, if the word may be allowed in this connection, 'trained' witnesses." It failed on two occasions at Glasgow because the conditions were "too positive," or the witnesses had too little faith.<sup>1</sup>

We are now in a position to see how it was that Home, unlike all other mediums, never suffered exposure. He would never perform in the presence of sceptics, and when he could not get rid of them he did nothing. Charles Bradlaugh was one of the committee appointed by the Dialectical Society to inquire into the phenomena attributed to Spiritualism in 1873. Bradlaugh records: "I am bound to say that Mr. Home met me in the frankest manner possible. He told me I was one of the few people he wanted very much to see.....I met him in the same frank spirit; and as he offered every opportunity for investigation, we took it"—with the expected result; "we had not the scintilla of anything. I sat with Mr. Home night after night till Mr. Home was tired."<sup>2</sup>

Charles Bradlaugh was a powerful and determined man, and Home dared not try any tricks on him. Moreover, Bradlaugh would not allow his critical

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, vol. ii, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Bradlaugh*, by his Daughter, vol. i, p. 344.

faculties to be disarmed by Mr. Home's frank and open manner, which imposed on so many others.

Although Home was never publicly exposed, there is no doubt that many must have seen through some at least of his tricks; but, as we have pointed out, his peculiar position as an honoured guest placed him outside the category of the ordinary professional medium. Mr. Podmore, in fact, mentions a letter written by a gentleman in 1889, "in which the writer relates that, at a *séance* held in 1855, he saw plainly that the alleged 'spirit hands' were supported by, and in obvious connection with, Home's arms."<sup>1</sup> But, as this was written thirty-four years after the event, it would not be fair to attach much weight to it.

It has also been stated that Browning, the poet, caught Home in the act of trickery. Browning denied this to Mr. Myers; but, nevertheless, he considered Home a trickster and a charlatan, disagreeing on this matter with his wife, who seems to have been converted by Home to a belief in Spiritualism, much to the poet's distress. There is not the least doubt that Browning's scarifying *Sludge the Medium* was aimed at Home. Home himself, in a savage attack on Browning in *Incidents in My Life*,<sup>2</sup> declares, "Mr. Browning did intend his fancy portrait of Mr. Sludge to represent me," and tells of a violent scene that occurred between them a few days after Mr. and Mrs. Browning had attended one of Home's *séances*—Mrs. Browning, according

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> Second Series (1872), p. 98.

to Home, taking sides with Home against her husband.

Another famous man who was very dissatisfied with Home and his phenomena was Dr. Barthez, Napoleon's physician, afterwards physician to the Prince Imperial.

In his recollections, entitled *The Empress Eugenie and Her Circle*, there is a letter, written by himself from Biarritz, September 5, 1857, in which he describes a visit by Home to the Empress Eugenie, who had sent for him as soon as she knew Home was in the neighbourhood. Dr. Barthez observes: "The entire belief she has in him, the animation and violence with which she speaks of him, really distress me." Home's apparent ingenuousness did not impose on Dr. Barthez, who observes: "His simple, timid, half-awkward air seemed to me to conceal a very able *savoir faire*."

The Doctor did not attend the first *séance*, but, being requested to remain to the second one, he joined the company round the table, upon which the sitters placed their hands. Immediately the table moved; raps were heard; there were scratching sounds right and left—whether the spirits were scratching themselves, and if so, why, is not stated; Her Majesty's dress was pulled; a handbell was taken from a gentleman's hand; an accordion, held by Home with one hand, played an air. All this took place under the table, and lasted a quarter of an hour. Then the spirit rapped out a message that there were too many present, and indicated those whose presence it did not desire. "I was among



the number," says the Doctor, "the explanation of that being the incredulous smile which I felt was visible on my face."

Dr. Barthez declares to his friend that he is absolutely ignorant of the manner in which the phenomena were produced, but remarks that "inasmuch as everything has to take place under a table, out of sight ; and as no one is allowed to look, feel, or examine ; so long as I am not allowed to use such means as I have at my disposal to obtain information and avoid error ; so long as I am told that my incredulity hinders these manifestations from the other world ; I shall say that I have a perfect right to disbelieve in spirits, and to suspect the existence of very ordinary means, although these may escape me. In short, Mr. Home seemed to me to be a very able man, not only as a performer of tricks, but especially as a man who can command intelligences ; but the spirits he evokes are not those of the other world ; they are living intelligences that do his bidding."<sup>1</sup>

However, Dr. Barthez did not remain long in ignorance as to Home's method of producing phenomena ; for, in another letter to his friend, he throws light upon the subject. He says:—

It will amuse you to hear that one of the means by which Mr. Home evokes his spirits has at last been detected. The Empress is reduced to saying that the Home of to-day is not the Home of other

<sup>1</sup> Dr. E. Barthez, *The Empress Eugenie and her Circle* (1912), pp. 139-42.



days ; that he has lost his power, and is seeking to replace it by subterfuges. The matter is simple enough. Mr. Home has thin slippers, easily drawn on and off ; he has also, I fancy, cuts in his socks which leave his toes free. At the proper moment he throws off a slipper, and with his toes tugs at a dress here and there, rings a handbell, gives a rap on this side or that, and, the thing once done, quickly slips his foot back into the slipper again. This was seen by M. Morio, who drew up a full, signed, and written statement, with all the details necessary to establish the genuineness of his discovery. Home saw that he was found out, and I can tell you he cut a very sorry figure. He went out, saying he was ill, and all night he had nervous attacks and visions, and has been surrounded by spirits. Finally, as he was judged to be on the point of death, a priest was sent for, and a doctor.

On the next day, death being apparently still imminent, Dr. Barthez was summoned. His account continues :—

He pitched a long tale about his sufferings, the spirits that tormented him, and so forth. Unhappily, he had the most natural pulse imaginable. Then he pretended to go into a trance ; his eyes turned up and became fixed ; evidently the spirits were returning, and about to torment him again. So I took him by the arm, shook it rather roughly, and said in his ear : "Come, Mr. Home, no nonsense ; let all the spirits be ; you know I do not believe in them." The trance ceased at that, and he looked me straight in the face, and saw plainly enough that I was laughing at him ; and the spirits immediately flew away.....I even drew up a statement which I gave to M. Morio de l'Île to add to his account. The evocation of spirits at the villa has suddenly ceased, and we will hope this unworthy charlatan is revealed in his true colours. But Her Majesty cannot admit

that any one could have the face to play tricks on herself and the Emperor for a whole year.<sup>1</sup>

The signed and attested statement of M. Morio ought to be published, if it has not been destroyed in deference to Imperial wishes. It is certain that Home would have been exposed upon this occasion but for the fact that the presence of the Empress prevented the exposers from causing a scene. That is where Home had the advantage over the ordinary medium ; his position as a member of society on an equal footing with his patrons protected him.

We can see by this account of Dr. Barthez how Home did some of his unaccountable tricks. He could use his feet as a substitute for his hands. We know that this is quite possible if the feet are trained fairly early in life ; and, as we have seen, Home commenced mediumship in his teens. I can remember, when a lad, hearing my father say that he saw an armless painter in Antwerp Cathedral painting pictures, holding the brush with his toes. The unshod peoples of warmer climates are much more proficient in using their toes than those whose feet have been cramped by boots. Eusapia Palladino, as we shall see, used her feet to produce "phenomena" in exactly the same way ; and, as her parents were Italian peasants, probably she went unshod in early life.

<sup>1</sup> Barthez, *The Empress Eugenie and her Circle* (1912), pp. 164-65-66.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DAVENPORT BROTHERS

I confess that my admiration of Hamlet is somewhat dulled by reason of that ill-advised remark to Horatio about there being more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophies. The occultist always seizes upon that citation to refute the scientist. He prints it as his motto on his books and journals, and regards it as a slow poison that will in time effect the destruction of the rabble of scientists, and reveal the truth of his own Psycho-Harmonic Science or Heliocentric Astrology. It is one thing to be open-minded, and to realize the incompleteness of scientific knowledge, and to appreciate how often what was ignored by one generation has become the science of the next; and it is a very different thing to be impressed with coincidences and dreams and premonitions, and to regard them as giving the keynote to the conceptions of nature and reality, and to look upon science as a misdirected effort. Such differences of attitude depend frequently upon a difference of temperament as well as upon intellectual discernment. The man or woman who flies to the things not dreamt of in our philosophy quite commonly does not understand the things which our philosophy very creditably explains.—PROFESSOR JOSEPH JASTROW, *Fact and Fable in Psychology* (1901), p. 42.

AT about the time of Home's first visit to England (1855) the Davenport Brothers began touring through America with their famous cabinet and its effects, which included a fiddle, guitar, tambourines, trumpet, and bells. They toured for seven years, and met with great success, especially during the last three years, when they created great excitement everywhere. However, in the end, the Civil War proved more exciting than their performance, and

they crossed over to England, where they were introduced to representatives of the press at a meeting held at the house of Dion Boucicault, the dramatist, towards the end of September, 1864. Podmore says: "Of all the American mediums who from time to time during the last half century have visited Europe none perhaps, with the single exception of Home, have achieved so immediate and so wide a fame as the Davenport Brothers."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Maskelyne says of their performances: "They were, and still remain, the most inexplicable ever presented to the public as of supernatural origin; and, had they been simply put forward as feats of jugglery, would yet have awakened a considerable amount of curiosity, though certainly not to the extent they did. They 'did more than all other men to familiarize England with the so-called *Spiritualism*.'"<sup>2</sup>

Ira and William Davenport were born at Buffalo in 1839 and 1841 respectively. Their father was in the "police department"; the boys had to "rough it," and began life delivering newspapers. "While they were still only children," says Mr. Maskelyne, "the 'Rochester knockings' commenced, and doubtless from their employment they were well posted up in all the latest 'phenomenal development,' as the newspapers of the day were teeming with such rubbish."<sup>3</sup>

At fifteen years of age Ira began to exhibit signs of mediumship. Rappings were heard; tables were

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> J. N. Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

moved; crockery was shifted; Ira and William were credited with the power of being able to fly. "Before a few 'believers' in a darkened room Ira was lifted bodily into the air and floated close to the ceiling; and William, with an auctioneer hanging to his legs, is said to have been 'raised up with such force that his head broke through the ceiling of lath and plaster.' People heard the crash! Was not that sufficient proof? And there could be no mistake when, a light having been obtained, a hole was found in the ceiling."<sup>1</sup>

The fame of the Davenport Brothers spread widely. Many persons travelled from New York, three hundred miles away, to witness the marvels. One of these pilgrims, a Swedenborgian minister of Brooklyn, named Barratt, locked himself in a candle-lit room with the "Boys." The candle was extinguished, and it was then rubbed over his face to enable him, so the spirits said, "to swallow the truth"; and his hat, after being dipped in a tub of water, was thrust dripping upon his head.<sup>2</sup> This vigorous method of "rubbing it in" proved effective; the minister was convinced!

On their arrival in England the Davenport Brothers were accompanied by a lecturer, Dr. J. B. Ferguson, formerly an Independent minister, of Nashville, Tennessee, and one of the most noted and popular preachers of the Southern States. He became a prominent figure during the Civil War,

<sup>1</sup> Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 62; citing from *The Biography of the Brothers*, by T. L. Nichols, M.D.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62; citing Nichols's *Biography*, p. 63.



through his eloquent addresses, on the Confederate side. Early in life he had become convinced of the reality of Spiritualism through the study of mesmerism and the so-called animal magnetism. Mr. Maskelyne says that in Ferguson's hands "the 'juggling Gemini' were little better than tools."<sup>1</sup> Podmore, on the contrary, speaks of Ferguson as "a man of considerable ability, high standing, and unquestioned sincerity. He appears to have accompanied the Davenports in order at once to testify to their good faith and to expound the philosophy of Spiritualism. There can be little doubt that his presence, and the guarantee implied, did much to secure that favourable prepossession on which, as we shall later see reason to believe, a medium's success primarily depends."<sup>2</sup>

The fact is that Ferguson, by his gift of eloquence, imparted a religious character to the performance, impressing the audience with a mysterious awe. The *Lancet* says, "His earnest and solemn appeal was admirable," and speaks of him as "a somewhat weak-headed but right honest gentleman."<sup>3</sup>

The Brothers were also accompanied by Palmer, a theatrical agent who acted as their business representative, and by William M. Fay, who had been a check-taker at their performances in America. Fay had discovered their tricks, and, becoming an adept in them, was retained as an understudy.

Their performance was as follows: A cabinet,

<sup>1</sup> Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, vol. ii, p. 56.

like a clothes-press or wardrobe, was erected on trestles ; the front of the cabinet was equally divided into three doors, fastened on the inside by a flat and easily moved bolt. The middle door had an oval opening near the top, curtained on the inside by a piece of black velvet. Round the inside of the cabinet, at sitting height, was a narrow plank ; on this at opposite sides sat the Davenport Brothers. Any two gentlemen in the audience were then invited to bind their hands, feet, and bodies to the bench as firmly as they could. This being done, a guitar, a fiddle and bow, a tambourine, a heavy brass speaking-trumpet, and two handbells were placed on the bench between the brothers, apparently out of their reach. The two side doors were then bolted from the inside. The middle door was closed, and immediately, before the brothers could possibly have released themselves, the bolt was heard to rattle down. The explanation of this 'somewhat staggering performance is that the bolt was within reach of the mouth of one of the brothers. By the time the audience had begun to recover from this surprise, spirit hands were seen at the oval opening, followed by what the *Times* reporter described as a combination of noises, "compared with which the performance of the most obtrusive German band that ever awakened the wrath of a Babbage is the harmony of the spheres."<sup>1</sup> When the sounds ceased the cabinet was opened, and the brothers were found to be still bound, as before. *When the sounds had*

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, September 30, 1864.

*ceased*—not before. The brothers had control of the bolts, which were all *inside*; and, of course, they never allowed the cabinet to be opened until they were ready.

The doors being closed again, the heavy trumpet was flung violently through the opening at the top, and the other instruments followed “without the smallest respect to the heads of the visitors,” says the same reporter, who records: “I myself received a blow on the face from a floating guitar, which drew enough blood to necessitate the employment of towel and sponge.” By the heated imagination of the faithful, the instruments were described as floating and playing in the air.<sup>1</sup>

The performance created a great sensation, described as “the *Tie-fuss* fever” by *Punch*, which gazetted the brothers as “Ministers of the Interior, with a seat in the Cabinet.” Even the staid and solid *Lancet* discussed the subject, insisting on the extreme difficulty of securing satisfactory ligatures, especially with the cord provided by the Davenports for the purpose. It was also pointed out that the brothers were apparently “possessed of great physical power and activity”; that in particular their hands were such as a professional conjurer might envy; and, finally, that after each cabinet performance one or both brothers betrayed violent action of the heart, disturbed respiration, and other symptoms consistent with extreme muscular exertion.<sup>1</sup> *Punch* propounded the following conundrum:

<sup>1</sup> *Lancet*, October 8, 1864; cited by Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 59.

“Why are the Davenport Brothers like an ophiocleide? Because they are brazen and blown.”

Mr. Maskelyne says that “when the Davenports secured themselves the manifestations were instantaneous; but *when properly tied* the spirits were frequently a long time before releasing them.”<sup>1</sup>

“After a successful season in London,” says Podmore, “they went to the provinces, and in Liverpool met with disaster. On the committee appointed from among the audience on the first night were two gentlemen who possessed the secret of a special knot called the Tom Fool’s knot. This knot they applied to the wrists of the Davenport brothers. Each protested that the knot was unfairly tight and injured the circulation. A doctor summoned to the platform gave it as his opinion that no injury to the circulation was to be apprehended, and that, in view of the smallness of the medium’s hands, the knot was not unnecessarily tight. The Davenports refused to proceed with the performance under such conditions, and Ferguson was ordered to cut the knots. The proceedings culminated in a riot, and the Davenports had to fly the town. A like reception awaited them at Huddersfield and at Leeds, whither the fame of Tom Fool’s knot had preceded them.”<sup>2</sup>

At the Liverpool fiasco, when William was released, he held up his hand, on the back of which blood was flowing. Mr. Maskelyne says: “Dr. Ferguson wished the audience to believe that the

<sup>1</sup> Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 60.

wound upon William's wrist had been caused by the severe tying ; whereas it was obvious that he himself had inflicted a slight cut in releasing the performer. The excited crowd, now more sceptical than ever, scrambled upon the platform, and, thrusting the reverend gentleman from Nashville, Tennessee, into the cabinet, turned it over upon him—much as the young bucks of the past treated the ancient 'Charleys'—and in the end the structure was smashed, and the pieces borne away as trophies.”<sup>1</sup>

The credit of exposing the Davenports is always given by the Press to Mr. Maskelyne. The facts are these : Being present at a performance by the Davenports at the Cheltenham Town Hall, Mr. Maskelyne writes, “I was elected a representative of the audience, and by the accidental fall of a curtain, hung over a window to exclude the light, I got a key to the *knotty* problem, which I have ever since used with such effect to reproduce all the tricks of the brothers.”<sup>2</sup> Mr. Maskelyne does not say whether this was before or after the Liverpool exposure, but the point is not important, since it is clear he made no public exposure at the time. He kept the knowledge to himself, and several months later, at the Crystal Palace, he, with his partner, Mr. Cooke, reproduced the Davenport tricks so faithfully that Spiritualists at once claimed them as mediums. “The venerable Father of English Spiritualists, Mr. Benjamin Coleman, considers us,” says Mr. Maskelyne, “very powerful mediums, who

<sup>1</sup> Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 66.



find it more profitable to pander to the prejudices of the multitude by pretending to expose Spiritualism than by honestly taking their proper place in our ranks as spiritual media." Messrs. Maskelyne and Cooke, he goes on, "are now, in my opinion, the best of living mediums for the production of *strong physical manifestations*. This statement, often repeated by me, has been met with the remark, 'But they themselves say they *are not* mediums'; as if what *they say* should influence the minds of any intelligent Spiritualist who sees *what they do*.'" <sup>1</sup> Such are the argumentative methods of the leaders of Spiritualism !

The brothers, their occupation in this country gone, departed for the Continent, eventually returning to America. At the close of the year 1894 Ira Davenport and Mr. Fay attempted to revive the rope tricks in Washington. According to Mr. Maskelyne: "After thoroughly advertising the revival, and obtaining a number of preliminary puffs in the Press, the receipts at the first performance amounted to only 11 dollars, 50 cents. They were advertised for six nights, but closed after the first performance ; and their 'cabinet' was distrained for rent." <sup>2</sup> We have it on the same authority that "one of them died in Australia many years ago, and shortly before he died both brothers confessed that all they did was trickery." <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Spiritualist*, October 10, 1875 ; *ibid*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> *The English Illustrated Magazine*, January, 1895, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> J. N. Maskelyne, in a letter to Mr. Smedley, April 15, 1909.

## CHAPTER VI

### EGLINTON AND MR. STEAD

Discussion and examination are fatal to miracles.....miracles only exist when people believe in them. The supernatural owes its existence only to faith.....miracles.....never occur where they would be most effective.....A miracle at Paris, for instance, before experienced savants would put an end to all doubts! But, alas! such a thing never happens. A miracle never takes place before an incredulous and sceptical public, the most in need of such a convincing proof. Credulity on the part of the witness is the essential condition of a miracle. There is not a solitary exception to the rule that miracles are never produced before those who are able or permitted to discuss and criticize them.—ERNEST RENAN, *The Apostles* (1895), p. 28.

I do not believe even eye-witnesses when they tell me things opposed to common sense.—VOLTAIRE.

EVEN expert conjurers have themselves been deluded by Spiritualistic physical phenomena. The great Robert Houdin himself testified to the clairvoyant powers of the Frenchman, Alexis Didier, after a visit he paid him in 1847. “Bellachini, Court conjurer at Berlin, in December, 1877, executed a solemn declaration before a notary to the effect that not only had he failed to discover any mechanical means by which the phenomena occurring in Slade’s presence could have been produced, but that he regarded it as impossible to explain these occurrences by prestidigitation of any kind.” Even the redoubtable Mr. Maskelyne, thirty years ago, put it on

record that the movements of a table at a *séance* he had witnessed were not due to muscular force or trickery, but to some kind of "psychic or nerve force." This opinion, however, he abandoned long before his death. Harry Kellar, another famous conjurer, was of opinion, after his first *séance* with Eglinton, that the slate-writing "was in no way the result of trickery or sleight-of-hand." Dr. George Herschell, a well-known amateur conjurer, failed to rival Eglinton's performances, after some months of practice and many sittings with the medium, and expressed the opinion that "they could not have been due to trickery or conjuring."<sup>1</sup>

This William Eglinton was a worthy successor to Slade. As we have said, the public has a short memory, and in 1886, ten years after the hurried flight of Slade, we find about a hundred persons, many of them men of distinction in various departments, writing to the Spiritualist newspaper, *Light*, testifying to the marvellous spirit-writing on slates produced in Eglinton's *séances*. Podmore says: "In the history of the movement no physical manifestation ever won such universal recognition," notwithstanding that Eglinton had been detected upon at least two occasions of fraud at materializing *séances* held in 1876, and of co-operation with Madame Blavatsky in manufacturing a Theosophic miracle.

Professor Carvill Lewis had two sittings with Eglinton in the winter of 1886, says Podmore, and, "by purposely turning his head away and pretending

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. i, p. 143; vol. ii, pp. 204-205.

to divert his attention, Professor Lewis was able not only to hear Eglinton's doings as he wrote on the slates, unrolled a piece of paper on which a question was written, etc., but occasionally to see the movements of the tendons of the wrist in the act of writing, and other signs of muscular action on his part necessary for the performance of the trick."<sup>1</sup>

It was this Eglinton who converted the late Mr. Stead to Spiritualism. Mr. Stead was so impressed by Eglinton's performance that he suggested a special *séance* for the benefit of Mr. Maskelyne and a mutual friend. Mr. Maskelyne consented to attend; "but," says Mr. Maskelyne, "Eglinton flatly refused to meet me under any conditions whatever."<sup>2</sup> Thereupon Mr. Maskelyne produced two slates, upon one of which he wrote a question. "The slates," says Mr. Maskelyne, "were then screwed together, with a morsel of slate pencil between them, and then put into this tin case, which I soldered up as roughly as possible, leaving marks from the soldering bolt which it would be impossible to reproduce, and which were photographed. I sent this case to Mr. Stead, desiring him not to let Eglinton know that it came from me, but to tell him that, if he could get an answer written inside, it would be of the greatest possible advantage to Spiritualism, and would make a convert of a great antagonist who had promised to proclaim the result to the world. Eglinton was to be allowed to take the slates home with him and keep them as long as he pleased. He promised to

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, pp. 296-97.

<sup>2</sup> *The English Illustrated Magazine*, January, 1895, p. 79.

do so, but he ultimately refused to have anything to do with the test.”<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, says Mr. Maskelyne,

Mr. Stead arranged with my son to photograph a spirit under conditions which would preclude the possibility of trickery. To this end, Mr. Stead endeavoured to find a medium of unimpeachable character, but was informed by the Spiritualists that they only knew of one—a lady who had left for Australia, and therefore was not available. Some months afterwards I received a letter from Mr. Stead, saying that he had met with a wonderful materializing medium, and desired that we should attend to photograph a spirit at a *séance* to be held the next day; but, as usual, the next post brought the information that the medium had been taken ill, and the *séance* was postponed. Since then the camera and accessories have been constantly in readiness, but we are still waiting.<sup>2</sup>

The wonderful lady medium was Mrs. Mellon, who was exposed at Sydney.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> *The English Illustrated Magazine*, January, 1895, pp. 80-81.



## CHAPTER VII

### ROBERT OWEN AND HIS SON

With regard to the fact that various men, eminent in some sections of science, have expressed their belief in the reality of the existence of spirits apart from the human body, we may remark that the ability of man in one subject is but rarely a proof of his ability in another; we know that, although Ampere was an eminent mathematician, he was also a devout believer in transubstantiation; that Faraday was a great discoverer, and yet a believer in the doctrines of Sandeman; Volta, a Roman Catholic. Spiritualists appear to be in a somewhat similar position now that believers in witchcraft, miracles, and other occult agencies, were in former times.—G. GORE, *The Scientific Basis of Morality* (1899), p. 307.

History teems with delusions, and neither talent nor integrity, piety nor single-mindedness, religion nor law, nor all of them combined, have proved a safeguard against them.—E. C. BREWER, *Dictionary of Miracles* (1884), p. xiv.

IN 1853, five years before his death, Robert Owen, the great reformer, was converted to Spiritualism by the tricks of Mrs. Hayden, an American medium on a visit to England. Through her, Owen declared, "I had then for some days various communications with the spirits of my deceased brothers and sisters, all of whom gave me true answers respecting the time and place of their death."<sup>1</sup> Communication with the "spirits" at Mrs. Hayden's *séances* was obtained by means of raps. The visitor was given a card with the alphabet printed on it, and told to

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Life of Robert Owen*, vol. ii, p. 606.

ask a question of the spirits, and to run a pencil slowly down the alphabet until a rap was heard; the letter thus indicated would be written down, and the process repeated until the whole word or sentence had been given. "At about the same date as Owen's manifesto," says Mr. Podmore, "G. H. Lewes, in the *Leader*, had explained to his readers how the trick was done, and related that by carefully emphasized hesitation at the appropriate letters he had held a conversation with one of the Eumenides, receiving much information, not to be found in any classical dictionary, about his interlocutor's domestic relations; and had induced the table to confess, in reply to his mental questions, that Mrs. Hayden was an impostor, and that the ghost of Hamlet's father had seventeen noses."<sup>1</sup>

Robert Dale Owen followed his father in this superstition, and wrote two books upon the subject: *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* and *The Debatable Land between this World and the Next*. In the latter he gives an account of *séances* held with Foster, the American medium; and this account proves, says Mr. Carrington, "that, although Mr. Owen was doubtless a clever man and a fine collector of evidence for the supernormal, he was anything but a good *observer*. That Foster was an impostor there can be no doubt."<sup>2</sup> Truesdell, who detected and exposed him, describes his methods as follows:—The sitters were invited to write their

<sup>1</sup> *Leader*, March 12, 1853; cited in Podmore's *Life of Robert Owen*, vol. ii, p. 609.

<sup>2</sup> Carrington, *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, p. 8.

questions on ballots and place them on the table. Foster would then distract the sitters' attention by asking them to examine the under surface of the table, or by some similar device. While they were so engaged he would replace the ballots on the table with a duplicate set he had ready. To read the questions now in his possession he employed the following trick, described by Truesdell:—"I had noticed at each interview that Mr. Foster, who is an inveterate smoker, had a great deal of trouble to keep his cigar alight. Half-a-dozen times during each sitting he would strike a match, and, holding it in a peculiar manner as if he was in the open air where a strong wind was blowing, would take a whiff or two, and allow the cigar to go out again; and while he was engaged in the troublesome task of relighting his cigar he was at the same time reading, by the aid of the very match so carefully employed, an open ballot held in the palm of his right hand!"<sup>1</sup> At the next sitting Truesdell put his discoveries to the test by suddenly seizing the five ballots lying on the table; he found every one of them a *blank*, though they were supposed to be the identical ones on which his sitters had written their questions. That the blank ballots had been substituted for the others was therefore clear. Foster, realizing that the secret had been discovered, broke down, and confessed the whole trick.

Robert Dale Owen was also imposed upon by the

<sup>1</sup> Truesdell, *Bottom Facts Concerning Spiritualism*, pp. 137-38; cited by Carrington in *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, pp. 8-9.

Holmeses, who used to materialize the spirit of a young girl named Katie King. Owen used to have daily converse with this spirit; he called her "daughter," while she spoke to him as "father." He presented her with bracelets, rings, and other jewellery, in the belief that she took the trinkets with her into the world of spirits and dematerialized them.

One day a certain Leslie, also a Spiritualist, came to Mr. Owen, weeping, and saying: "Oh, this is a very ugly business." "What is the matter?" "Why, that we have all been taken in in the meanest way; Katie King is not a spirit, but a live woman." "It cannot be!" exclaimed Owen, indignantly. "I was so fond of her; she is so charming; she cannot have deceived me; it is all some silly slander against my dear daughter." But Leslie produced all the presents—not in the least dematerialized, and gave the name of the daring creature who had so successfully personated the spirit. Owen was in despair, and fell ill with vexation. When he had recovered somewhat and come to himself, he wished to satisfy himself about the fraud, so the so-called Katie King, in the presence of him and others, dressed up as a spirit and went through all her part with the greatest precision. The old man was convinced of the fraud, and, like an honest man, without fear of ridicule, he published an account of everything in the papers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, pp. 238-39.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE NATURALIST DR. WALLACE

We are far from the time when Pascal could say "Miracles are as a flash of lightning that reveals." The lightning no longer flashes. Science stands ready to explain the first miracle that arises in support of a new religion.—GUYAU, *The Non-Religion of the Future*, p. 355.

It is not from one argument only but from the whole of modern science that the tremendous result is derived. "There is no such thing as the supernatural."

Nature is simply human reason ; it is the immutable, the exclusion of everything savouring of the whimsical ; and our modern task will not be accomplished until we have destroyed the belief in the supernatural, no matter in what shape—the same that we have destroyed the belief in magic and witchcraft. All these belong to the same order of things.—ERNEST RENAN, *The Future of Science* (1891), pp. 40-41.

MRS. GUPPY, formerly Miss Nichols, was a famous medium, in whom Alfred Russel Wallace placed implicit belief. Wallace relates how, at a sitting *when all the lights had been turned out for some time*, Miss Nichols—a very heavy woman—was discovered, on a light being struck, seated on her chair in the centre of the table. But this was a mere bagatelle to the feat she accomplished in June 1871, when the spirits conveyed her from her home at Highbury Hill Park to 69 Lamb's Conduit Street—three miles—and plumped her down through the roof and several ceilings (without damaging them)



upon the centre of the table, with her household account-book in one hand and in the other a pen with the ink still wet upon it! It should be remarked that this took place at a *séance* held by Herne and Williams, two of the most arrant rogues and impostors in the history of Spiritualism. *Punch* satirized the performance as follows:—

There is a lady, Mrs. Guppy  
Mark, shallow scientific puppy!  
The heaviest she in London, marry,  
Her, spirits three long miles did carry.

Upon a table down they set her,  
Within closed doors. What! you know better;  
And we're all dupes and self-deceivers?  
Yah! Sadducees and unbelievers!<sup>1</sup>

Mr. E. Smedley allows me to quote the following from a letter written by Mr. J. N. Maskelyne to himself, dated April 15, 1909. Mr. Maskelyne, speaking of Mrs. Guppy, says: "She was a fat, vulgar woman. I once advertised a pair of old houses for sale, and Mrs. Guppy (then Mrs. Volckman) came to my house to see them. We struck a bargain, and had a glass of wine together afterwards. I asked her how the spirits were getting on, and she gave me a knowing wink and burst out laughing. She had given up Spiritualism then." And further, in the same letter, speaking of Dr. Wallace, Mr. Maskelyne says: "There is no doubt about the sincerity of Dr. Wallace, but if you knew him personally you could not fail to see that he is

<sup>1</sup> For account of this performance see Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 100, and Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, pp. 81-82.

just the kindly confiding gentleman that can be imposed upon."

Moncure Conway relates how, being challenged to test Mrs. Guppy, he accepted the challenge, and took Professor Clifford along with him. A dozen sat round the table; raps were heard from the spirits, ordering the lights to be put out and each one of the company to choose something to be thrown on the table. The door was locked, and the key given to Conway to hold. Various things were called for—a rose, a slipper, violets, etc. Says Conway: "Clifford demanded a small plate of artificial teeth which were in the pocket of his overcoat in the hall. I said it was necessary to call for something not easily concealed under a dress, and demanded a large bandbox. When the lights were turned on everything was on the table except what Clifford and I had demanded. Mrs. Guppy admitted the *séance* to be a failure, and did not venture on any further experiments."<sup>1</sup>

The medium Monck was another impostor who easily gulled Dr. Wallace. One of his feats was the production of a spirit form from his body while in a trance. Archdeacon Colley—a crank who created a sensation by lying shrouded in a coffin in his church—offered to pay Mr. Maskelyne a thousand pounds if he could reproduce Monck's trick. Mr. Maskelyne accepted the challenge, and succeeded in producing a form from his side. Colley attended the public performance of this trick on October 6,

<sup>1</sup> Conway, *Autobiography*, vol. ii, p. 352.

1906, and denied that Mr. Maskelyne had given a replica of Monck's performance, since the spirit form was not re-absorbed, but walked away. Mr. Maskelyne offered to repeat this part of the performance also, but Archdeacon Colley hastily withdrew his challenge.

Mr. Maskelyne distributed copies of a pamphlet entitled *The History of a Thousand Pound Challenge*, in which it was asserted that Colley was not an archdeacon and had obtained a nomination to that position by false pretences. Archdeacon Colley brought an action for libel against Mr. Maskelyne, who in his turn claimed the thousand pounds for reproducing Monck's trick. In the end the Archdeacon won small damages on the technical ground that he undoubtedly had the right to use the title of Archdeacon.

At the trial (Colley *v.* Maskelyne, April 24 to April 30, 1907) it came out that Monck was the son of a butcher, and had for some time been a Baptist minister. After he became a medium he gave *séances* at two guineas each, at which the familiar business with spirit hands, musical boxes, and so on, was produced.

At a *séance* held in Huddersfield a Mr. H. B. Lodge, an amateur conjurer, was present, and when the *séance* was ended he charged Monck with using certain apparatus, and promised to pay £50 if the musical box and other apparatus were not found upon him. The other credulous sitters begged Monck to submit to be searched, but he rushed at Mr. Lodge, attempted to strike him in the face, and then bolted upstairs to his bedroom, where he locked the door and escaped from the window with the aid

of sheets. When the door was opened "the whole bag of tricks" was discovered in the room. For, as Mr. Maskelyne wrote in *The History of a Thousand Pound Challenge*, "an examination of Monck's luggage revealed the fact that two large boxes and a full-sized travelling bath were filled with tricky apparatus, including spirit hands, spirit masks, a large quantity of gauzy material, a spirit bird, apparatus for floating tambourines, bells, spirit names, spirit lamps, and a number of most incriminating documents." Mr. Lodge took possession of these articles with the intention of giving public exposures of Spiritualism. The police, however, took the matter out of his hands, and prosecuted Monck. The trial lasted three days, and Monck was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, the maximum penalty.

"What influenced the magistrates in inflicting so severe a punishment were the incriminating documents, which included disgustingly immoral letters from both married and single women with whom Monck had intrigues under the cloak of Spiritualism and the convenience of the dark *séance*. In this respect Monck was but a fair specimen of professional mediums, as a body, both men and women."<sup>1</sup>

Yet even after this damning exposure Dr. Wallace, in the witness-box at the Colley trial, said: "I am absolutely certain that it [Monck's spirit form] could not have been produced by a trick"; and, in reply to counsel, Wallace explained that "Monck was not caught in the act of trickery. Monck was a guest on the occasion, and a demand was made that he should be searched, and he departed through the window."<sup>2</sup> Just so; he could not face a search

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural* (1911), pp. 286-87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

which would have revealed the musical box and probably other compromising articles. If he had nothing to fear, there was no need to depart by the window. Dr. Wallace, moreover, offered no explanation of the quantity of apparatus discovered in Monck's luggage.

The Colley challenges arose out of a controversy upon Spiritualism in the *Daily Telegraph*, one of its defenders citing a statement by the late Rev. H. R. Haweis that Mr. Maskelyne, being questioned before a committee of the Society for Psychical Research as to whether he could reproduce the phenomena achieved by certain mediums, replied in the negative, adding that it would require three tons of machinery for the purpose. "Mr. Maskelyne wrote a letter to refute this oft-repeated lie, pointing out that he possessed a letter from the Rev. H. R. Haweis himself apologizing for the falsehood."<sup>1</sup> It was to this that Colley responded with his thousand pound challenge.

The late Captain Noble, who, under the initials "F. R. A. S.," used to conduct the correspondence columns of the *English Mechanic*, dealt in 1903 with the case of the medium Anna Rothe, who was convicted in Berlin of pretending to produce roses, lilies, and oranges from the air by "spiritual agency," and received eighteen months' imprisonment. In the course of his comments he wrote:—

Your older readers will remember that this was the rôle of the notorious Mrs. Guppy, whose trickery

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural*, p. 79.



was exposed in Belfast, 1874, on the occasion of the meeting of the British Association there, by the pretty expedient of dropping a few crystals of potassium ferrocyanide into the ewer and carafou in her bedroom, and other water to which she had access, and which salt was subsequently discovered on the calyx and corolla of the asters and hollyhocks so supernaturally produced! In the woman Rothe's case a much less refined method was adopted, and she was caught, *flagrante delicto*, by the police official, who seized her bodily, and found a huge supply of flowers up her petticoats! This rough-and-ready way of seizing the medium or "materialized spirit" was employed, as will be remembered, with signal success in the case of Miss Florence Cook, who so thoroughly took in poor Sir William Crookes, and who was exposed by Sir George Sitwell and Herr von Buch; that of the Holmes's; in that of Herne; in that of Miss Showers; in that of Bastian and Taylor (at Arnheim)—and so very many others. Possibly from a wholesome dread of the provisions of the Act 5 Geo. IV., c. 83, s. 4, those scandalous impostors the "Spiritual Media" have retired into the background in this country lately, and as medium after medium has been exposed their dupes have decreased in number.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless most people, unless they happen to have made a study of the subject, would be at a loss to give particulars about the frauds of mediums and their exposure if challenged by a Spiritualist. Even the best encyclopædias fail one here. As this is the case, and as there appears to be a strong attempt made to revive these frauds and follies, it will be useful to recall a few of the more notable exposures.

<sup>1</sup> *English Mechanic*, April 17, 1903, p. 211.

Bastian, the last-mentioned medium in the foregoing quotation, was exposed in the winter of 1884. The Archdukes John and Rudolph of Austria, being desirous of investigating Spiritualism, invited Harry Bastian to Vienna, where he gave two *séances*, on January 17 and 30, 1884. The performances aroused the deepest suspicion. The princes therefore requested another *séance*, and the date was fixed for February 11 of the same year. Says Lanslot: "They were bent upon surprising the medium in the midst of his operations, and find out for sure whether there was any jugglery about them. They so arranged that the doors could be suddenly closed by means of a hidden mechanism, and prevent egress from the room in which Bastian was supposed to be lying in a trance while the spirits made their apparitions. The evening of the experiment sounds were heard, sparks were seen, raps came next, followed finally by materializations. Suddenly a white and well-defined figure passed out of the room in which the Archdukes had seen Bastian lying on the sofa in a state of lethargy. Immediately they set the machinery to work; it slammed the door behind the white figure. The spirit frantically tried to open the door, but in vain. The Archdukes jumped at him, tore the clothes from his body: the spirit was no other but the same medium, Harry Bastian, in flesh and bone. Finding himself unmasked, he began to tremble like a leaf. The princes felt pity for him, and gently assured him that all was over, and that he had nothing to fear. A report of the discovery was duly made and signed

by all those present. A detailed account of it was given to the Press."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Moncure Conway relates how, at a *séance* held at his house, the famous medium Williams was exposed by himself and Professor Clifford as follows:—

The method of Williams was that we should surround the table, finger hooked in finger; then in the dark he would make some excuse for changing the finger, and contrive to get those on each side of him to hook the forefinger and little finger of the same hand, leaving one of his hands free to do the tricks. Clifford had heard of that device, and warned me. When we had been seated for some time, Williams said his finger held by Clifford was weary, and proposed to change it; but Clifford in a low voice declined on his side, as I did on mine. Whereupon Williams raised the light and rushed out of the house, leaving his accordion and banjo, which I sent to him next day. Several credulous ladies who had been victimized by Williams were present, and had the detection explained to them. Williams was broken up in London by this exposure, and the last I heard of him was at Rotterdam, where the Customs officers seized his paraphernalia of wigs, masks, rag hands, and phosphorus.<sup>2</sup>

Here is an account of the exposure in Holland of the same medium and his partner Rita:—

In September, 1878, a group of Dutch Spiritualists detected the mediums Williams and Rita in flagrant trickery at Amsterdam. The exposure was complete. At a dark *séance* a figure purporting to be a materialized spirit-form named "Charlie" showed his face by the light of a spirit lamp. One of the

<sup>1</sup> Lanslot, *Spiritism Unveiled* (1913), pp. 109–10.

<sup>2</sup> Conway, *Autobiography*, vol. ii, p. 352.

circle, whose suspicions had been aroused at a previous sitting, grasped "Charlie," and found himself holding Rita by the coat collar. After a sharp struggle a light was obtained, the two mediums were baffled in an attempt to escape from the house, and their persons were searched. Upon Rita were found a false beard, several large handkerchiefs, and a small circular bottle of phosphorized oil—the raw material of "Charlie" and his spirit lamp. On Williams were found also a beard, much used, several yards of dirty muslin, handkerchiefs, a bottle of phosphorized oil, and a bottle of scent—objects familiar in happier circumstances to the eye of faith as the bearded mariner "John King," with turban, lamp, and spirit perfume. In Williams's handbag were found a small tube filled with minute pieces of slate-pencil, and a piece of notched whalebone—the instruments employed for writing on closed slates.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the leading Spiritualists would not admit these frauds. Thus, when in January, 1880, Mrs. Corner (Miss Cook) was seized under similar circumstances by Sir G. Sitwell and Mr. Carl von Buch, the editor of the *Spiritualist* pointed out that "grasping one of the forms and finding it to be the medium proves nothing"; while the editor of *Spiritualist* "Notes" has "no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that on the occasion of the recent seizure Mrs. Corner was completely guiltless of deception." Moreover, as Mr. Podmore sarcastically remarks: "Mrs. Corner's character as a genuine medium was vindicated on this occasion with unexampled rapidity by means of a successful *séance* held on the evening of the exposure at the

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Studies in Psychological Research* (1897), pp. 21-22.

house and in the presence of another professional medium.”<sup>1</sup>

To cite the same author again :—

In October, 1894, Mrs. Mellon (*née* Fairlamb) was seized in Sydney, N.S.W., when personating the spirit form of a little black girl, Cissie. Mrs. Mellon was discovered on her knees, with her feet bare, white muslin drapery round her shoulders, and a black mask on her face. In the cabinet were found a false beard and other properties. At about the same time Mrs. Williams was exposed in Paris, by the Duke de Medina Pomar and others. The medium in this latter case was found masquerading, in more or less appropriate dress, as the spirit of a man.<sup>2</sup>

Miss Annie Eva Fay was another medium who achieved fame by the ease with which she imposed upon Sir William Crookes, who, says Mr. Maskelyne, “after repeated visits to Miss Fay’s *séances*, was so convinced of the supernatural character of the performance that, in order to test his opinion, he invited the lady to his house, there to give a demonstration of her powers under what Spiritualists term ‘test conditions.’ Result, he discovered no trickery whatever. And how should he? The man of great attainments is, generally speaking, the one most easily puzzled. There is a simplicity of high intelligence just as there is a simplicity of ignorance. An ignorant person may not be able to see through the simplest trick; and a person of culture may be as readily deceived, for the simple reason that he

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.



cannot bring his mind *down* to the level of the deception practised.”<sup>1</sup>

After this Miss Fay betook herself to the provinces; but, owing to Mr. Maskelyne's public exposure of her tricks, the business fell off sadly, says Mr. Maskelyne, “and, being in low water, she made me an offer, through her manager (the letters are still in my possession), to come to London and explain publiely, for a sum of money, how she performed her tricks and how she humbugged the scientific gentleman aforesaid. I declined her offer, however, in the belief that my own exposure of the fraud was sufficient” (p. 194).

<sup>1</sup> Maskelyne, *The Supernatural*, p. 192.

## CHAPTER IX

### SIR WILLIAM CROOKES AND FLORRIE COOK

The present promoters of spiritual phenomena divide themselves into two classes, one of which needs no demonstration, while the other is beyond the reach of proof. The victims like to believe, and they do not like to be undeceived. Science is perfectly powerless in the presence of this frame of mind. It is, moreover, a state perfectly compatible with extreme intellectual subtlety and a capacity for devising hypotheses which only require the hardihood engendered by strong conviction, or by callous mendacity, to render them impregnable. The logical feebleness of science is not sufficiently borne in mind. It keeps down the weed of superstition, not by logic but by slowly rendering the mental soil unfit for its cultivation.—PROF. TYNDALL, *Fragments of Science* (1876), p. 321.

WE have seen how easily Sir William Crookes was taken in by Home and Anna Eva Fay. He was equally easily tricked and befooled by the medium Florrie Cook, who used to materialize the spirit of "Katie King" into a body of flesh and blood. Miss Cook would disappear behind the curtain, and shortly afterwards the spirit form of "Katie King" would appear. But the sceptical remarked that the photographs of "Katie" bore an unmistakable likeness to Miss Cook herself, and that the spirit form of "Katie" was never indisputably seen together with Miss Cook; that is, you could see "Katie" or you could see Miss Cook, but not both at the same time.

In order to silence these sceptical carpings, Miss

Cook sent Sir William Crookes and several others special invitations to attend *séances* held in her own house at Hackney; there the spirit form of "Katie" appeared simultaneously with Miss Cook. These *séances* took place on March 29 and May 21, 1874. Sir William's record of the *séance* held on March 29 states that—

Katie never appeared to greater perfection, and for nearly two hours she walked about the room conversing familiarly with those present. On several occasions she took my arm when walking, and the impression conveyed to my mind that it was a living woman by my side, instead of a visitor from the other world that.....I asked her permission to clasp her in my arms, so as to be able to verify the interesting observations which a bold experimentalist has recently somewhat verbosely recorded. Permission was graciously given, and I accordingly did—well, as any gentleman would under the circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. William Marriott, a clever conjurer, who contributed to *Pearson's Magazine*, under the title of "At the Edge of the Unknown," some articles ably exposing the frauds and pretensions of modern Spiritualism, accompanies the above quotation with the observation: "Sir William, after walking and talking with a young woman for two hours, after holding her in his arms and presumably kissing her, after emphasizing the strength of his impression that she was a living woman, still prefers to believe, not that she was a mundane being in collusion with the medium, but that she was a spirit. Ridicule is

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural*, citing from the *Spiritualist*, April 3, 1874.

easy, I am well aware, but it was never more thoroughly deserved than by this egregious piece of folly, the whole point of which is this : that we have a scientific investigator *himself* refusing point blank to accept the evidence of his own senses simply because it goes against his theories.”<sup>1</sup>

During the two hours that the “spirit” had been with them Miss Cook had not been seen ; their simultaneous appearance was to be the culminating triumph. Sir William says : “Katie now said she thought she should be able this time to show herself and Miss Cook together. I was to turn the gas out, and then come with my phosphorus lamp into the room now used as a cabinet.....I went cautiously into the room, it being dark, and felt about for Miss Cook. I found her crouching on the floor. Kneeling down, I let the air into the lamp, and by its light I saw the young lady, dressed in black velvet, as she had been in the early part of the evening, and to all appearance perfectly senseless.”

Sir William says he raised his lamp and saw “Katie” standing close behind Miss Cook, and continues : “Holding one of Miss Cook’s hands in mine, and still kneeling, I passed the lamp up and down, so as to illuminate Katie’s whole figure, and satisfied myself thoroughly that I was really looking at the veritable Katie whom I had clasped in my arms a few minutes before, and not at the phantom of a disordered brain.....At last Miss Cook moved slightly, and Katie instantly motioned me to go away.

<sup>1</sup> *Pearson’s*, June, 1910, p. 609.

I went to another part of the cabinet, and then ceased to see Katie, but did not leave the room till Miss Cook woke up and two of the visitors came in with a light.”<sup>1</sup>

Of course, “Katie” was a confederate introduced by Florrie Cook. It was the easiest matter in the world to carry out this trick, since the room, described by Sir William as the “cabinet,” *was Florrie Cook’s bedroom.*

The Rev. C. Maurice Davies, a convinced Spiritualist and a member of the Council of the “British National Association of Spiritualists,” describes, in his *Mystic London*, these *séances* at Florrie Cook’s house. He says:—

Two rooms communicated through folding-doors, the front apartment being that in which we assembled, and the back used as a bedroom, where the ladies took off their “things.” This latter room, be it remembered, had a second room communicating with the passage, and so with the universe of space in general. One leaf of the folding-doors was closed, and a curtain hung over the other. Pillows were placed on the floor, just inside the curtain, and the little medium, who was nattily arrayed in a blue dress, was laid upon them. We were requested to sing and talk during “materialization,” and there was as much putting up and lowering light as in a modern sensation drama. The Professor (Sir William, at that time Mr., Crookes) acted all the time as master of the ceremonies, retaining his place at the aperture, and, I fear, from the very first, exciting suspicion by his marked attention, not to the medium, but to the ghost.

<sup>1</sup> *The Spiritualist*, April 3, 1874; cited by Dr. Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural*, p. 278.



When it did come, it was arrayed according to orthodox ghost fashion, in loose white garments, and, I must confess, with no resemblance to Miss C.<sup>1</sup> We were at the same time shown the recumbent form of the pillowed medium, and there certainly was something blue, which might have been Miss C., or only her gown going to the wash.

By-and-by, however, with "lights down," a bottle of phosphorized oil<sup>2</sup> was produced, and, by this weird and uncanny radiance, one or two privileged individuals were led by the "ghost" into the back bedroom, and allowed to put their hands upon the entranced form of the medium. I was not of the "elect," but I talked to those who were, and their opinion was that the "ghost" was a much stouter, bigger woman than the medium; and I confess that certain unhallowed ideas of the bedroom door and the adjacent kitchen stairs connected themselves in my mind with recollections of a brawny servant girl, who used to sit sentry over the cupboard in the breakfast room—where was she?

As a final *bonne bouche*, the spirit made its exit from the side of the folding-door covered by the curtain, and immediately Miss C. rose up, with dishevelled locks, in a way that must have been satisfactory to anybody who knew nothing of the back door and the brawny servant, or who had never

<sup>1</sup> Mr. J. N. Maskelyne, who, in his *Modern Spiritualism*, pp. 143-44, gives the above quotation from the Rev. Davies's *Mystic London*, observes: "But 'Katie' was not always unlike the medium; indeed, the spirit has been known to apologize for the awkward resemblance of the two faces" (p. 143). Sir William Crookes, before this, had photographed Miss Cook and also the spirit form of "Katie"; and Podmore says: "The likeness between the two sets is unmistakable. Nor is it possible to substantiate any real difference" (Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 154). But at this time Miss Cook masqueraded as the spirit herself, without the aid of a confederate. It was to meet the objections as to the likeness between herself and the "spirit" that the *séances* at her own house were arranged.

<sup>2</sup> Dignified by Sir William into a "phosphorus lamp"!

seen the late Mr. Charles Kean act in the *Corsican Brothers* or the *Courier of Lyons*.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from this that Mr. Davies, though a clergyman and a Spiritualist, was not so easily deluded as the famous man of science, who was rewarded for his faith by "Katie's" unreserved confidence, which, he says, "gradually grew until she refused to give a *séance* unless I took charge of the arrangements. She said she always wanted me to keep close to her and near the cabinet, and I found that, after this confidence was established and she was satisfied I would not break any promise I might make to her, the phenomena increased greatly in power, and tests were freely given that would have been unobtainable had I approached the subject in another manner. She often consulted me about persons present at the *séances*, and where they should be placed, for of late she had become very nervous, in consequence of certain ill-advised suggestions that force should be employed as an adjunct to more scientific modes of research."<sup>2</sup>

It is evident from this that Sir William Crookes was like clay in the hands of Florrie Cook—a fact which bears out the observation of Mr. Marriott, already cited, that "The scientist who sits where he is told to sit, and looks where he is told to look, is the ideal subject for the wiles of the conjurer or the medium, and before him effects can be brought

<sup>1</sup> Cited from the Rev. C. M. Davies's *Mystic London* by J. N. Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism*, pp. 141-42.

<sup>2</sup> *The Spiritualist*, June 5, 1874; cited by J. N. Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 144.

off that would be impossible before an audience of schoolboys."

Having moulded Sir William—who appears to have been peculiarly susceptible to feminine influences—Florrie Cook used him as a bodyguard to stall off any attempt at detection.

It remains only to add that Florrie Cook was caught by Mr. Volckman in the act of impersonating a spirit at a *séance* held on December 9, 1873, several months before those we have described. Mr. Volckman was invited to the *séance* after nine months' importunity, and then only when, in accordance with a hint from Mr. Cook, he had presented Florrie with some jewellery. After forty minutes' careful observation of the "spirit" form materialized by Miss Cook, who was supposed to be seated in the cabinet, Mr. Volckman was convinced that the "spirit" of "Katie" was no ghost, but Miss Cook herself. He therefore rushed forward and seized first the hand and then the waist of the white-robed figure. Some of the medium's friends came to the rescue by knocking Mr. Volckman down and turning the gas out, thus enabling the "spirit" to regain the cabinet, where, after a *delay of about five minutes*—the Davenport brothers would have done it in half the time—Miss Cook was found still securely bound and sealed as at the beginning.<sup>1</sup> An eye-witness, writing to *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, describes the *fracas* as follows: "The unfortunate ghost must have had rather a critical time of it

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 103.

before it could be extricated from the grasp of Mr. Volckman by the combined efforts of a Justice of the Peace, a ship's officer, and a gentleman rejoicing in the appropriate name of 'Tapp,' who gallantly rushed to the rescue and brought Mr. Volckman heavily to the ground, at considerable damage to that gentleman's neck, elbow, and knee. The ghost also, instead of 'dissolving in thin air,' tore hair from Mr. Volckman's beard, a hirsute ornamentation upon which the owner says he prided himself considerably."<sup>1</sup>

Again, in January, 1874, at a dark *séance* with Miss Cook, one William Hipp seized the hand of the "spirit," which was sprinkling him with water, and, when a light was struck, found himself firmly grasping the hand of Miss Cook.<sup>2</sup> And again, at the end of her career (after she had become Mrs. Corner), in January, 1880, she was again seized while personating a spirit.<sup>3</sup> After this she retired from the business.

<sup>1</sup> J. N. Maskelyne, *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, vol. ii, p. 157, *note*.

## CHAPTER X

### MADAME BLAVATSKY: THE FOUNDER OF THEOSOPHY

Mabel Collins, who for over a year co-edited *Lucifer* with her [Madame Blavatsky], said: "She taught me one great lesson: I learned from her how foolish, how 'gullible,' how easily flattered human beings are, taken *en masse*. Her contempt for her kind was on the same gigantic scale as everything else about her, except her marvellously delicate taper fingers. In all else she was a big woman; she had a greater power over the weak and credulous, a greater capacity for making black appear white, a larger waist, a more voracious appetite, a more confirmed passion for tobacco, a more ceaseless and insatiable hatred for those whom she thought to be her enemies, a greater disrespect for *les convenances*, a worse temper, a greater command of bad language, and a greater contempt for the intelligence of her fellow-beings than I had ever supposed possible to be contained in one person."—Cited by J. N. MASKELYNE, *The Fraud of Theosophy Exposed*, pp. 62-63.

Her chief strength and the secret of her successes lay in her extraordinary cynicism and contempt for mankind; a cynicism which she used to conceal as a rule with great skill, but which still broke out irresistibly at times. "The simpler and the coarser the phenomenon," she subsequently admitted to me, "the more likely it is to succeed. The vast majority of people who are reckoned clever by themselves and others are hopeless fools....."—V. S. SOLOVYOFF, *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, pp. 71-72.

WE will now consider the career of that remarkable adventuress, Madame Blavatsky, the famous founder of the Theosophical Society. Madame Blavatsky was born in Russia in 1831 as Helen Petrovna, daughter of Colonel Hahn, of the Russian Army. At the age of seventeen she was married to an



elderly gentleman, M. Blavatsky. After a few months of married life she ran away from her husband, and entered upon her unique career of travel and adventure. The leading motive of her life appears to have been the search for "psychic" experiences and unusual and strange cults. She is said to have gone to India in order to absorb Hindu wisdom; to Egypt, "the motherland of superstition"; to Canada, to learn of the Red Indians; to New Orleans, to study Voodoo among the negroes; to Assyria, Siam, Cambodia, Mexico. "It is difficult to know what to believe," says Jastrow, "in the accounts prepared by her enthusiastic followers."<sup>1</sup> But, as Mr. Podmore observes: "For information regarding her past we had to rely mainly on her own account of herself; and research tended to show that this guarantee was insufficient."<sup>2</sup> Her life for the next thirty years is involved, says the same writer, "in an obscurity not wholly fortuitous."

However, in 1874, and for two or three years previously, Madame passed in Egypt and the United States as a spirit medium, in which profession she was associated—at any rate, during her residence at Cairo—with M. and Madame Coulomb. In 1875, with the aid of Colonel Olcott, Madame Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society. It was about this time that the star of Spiritualism began to wane; exposure followed fast on exposure. It was revealed that the manifestations at the dark *séance*

<sup>1</sup> Jastrow, *Fact and Fable in Psychology*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *Modern Materialism*, vol. ii, p. 163.

were not the work of spirits, but of the mediums themselves, with the help of rag hands, dirty muslin, phosphorized oil, false beards, and other material paraphernalia. Madame Blavatsky grasped the situation, and dropped Spiritualism for ever; or, rather, to be quite accurate, she metamorphosed it out of all recognition—she orientalized it. As Podmore observes: “We are enabled to trace how, by stern necessity, under pressure of the environment, Spiritualism was gradually metamorphosed into Theosophy, ghosts into astral bodies, spiritual phenomena into manifestations of the occult power of the human mind; how finally Madame from a medium evolved into a Chela; John King with his saucer-shaped cap became the Mahatma Morya with his turban; and the centre of the spiritual universe shifted from the *séance* room to the Thibetan Himalayas.”<sup>1</sup> “And when,” says the same writer, “a few years later it was found that the busy life of New York vexed that serene atmosphere which was essential to the due absorption of Theosophic truth, she found in India a ready welcome and a more congenial environment for herself and her Society.”<sup>2</sup> The Society’s headquarters were established at the Adyah, in the more suitable atmosphere of the mysterious East.

Now, whether Madame Blavatsky found that the mere teaching of the dry bones of Theosophy—as revealed in *Isis Unveiled*—brought no converts, and therefore no grist to the mill, or from vanity, or from

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Studies in Psychical Research*, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

pure love of mystification, or because she thought it safe to do in India things that would be risky in New York or London, we do not know; probably her motives were a mixture of all these elements. However that may be, reports began to arrive of new marvels, quite different from those of the old Spiritualistic *séance*; nor were they the work of spirits of the common, or garden, kind. They were due to the operations of the Mahatmas, wise men reputed to be several hundreds of years old, and yet still in their prime. These Mahatmas were far ahead of us in science, and held control of forces quite unknown to our greatest men of science, who by comparison could be regarded only as blind moles. "Sitting in their studies," says Mr. Edmund Garrett, "2,000 miles away in Thibet, they could, by a mere effort of will, project an astral epistle, or an astral body, or an astral cup and saucer, into the middle of an applauding circle at afternoon tea or picnic in Madras or Bombay. Showers of roses fluttered down from the ceiling. Invisible bells tinkled from none knew where. All kinds of tricks were played with Madame's interminable cigarettes. Sketches and treatises were physically 'precipitated' on to blank paper—nay, sometimes the very stationery was created out of nothing to receive them. Such inferior sketches, too, and such twaddling, such very twaddling, treatises."<sup>1</sup> In 1884 Madame Blavatsky came to England, and "starred" London; but, says the same author, "In spite of the disappointing

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Garrett, *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, pp. 14-15.

fact that the London air proved unfavourable to miracles, the tale of the Indian ones was greedily drunk in, and Theosophy became the fashionable fad" (p. 16).

Madame's star was in the ascendant; this was the heyday of her popularity.

Madame Blavatsky, seeking a habitation for the marvellous Mahatmas she had evolved from her inner consciousness to replace the now discredited mediums, an abode where they would be secure from the madding crowd of unbelievers and sceptics who detected and exposed the best laid plans for exploiting the multitude, Madame decided that no place could answer better than Thibet. A few travellers had entered the country in disguise, at the risk of their lives, and had brought back accounts of the Grand Lama and the immense monasteries, which had aroused the highest curiosity. Other travellers had been turned back, or, if they had persisted, had been barbarously treated, and barely escaped with their lives. No European had ever, until the British military expedition led by Colonel Younghusband in 1904, penetrated to Lhasa, the capital, which was therefore wrapped in a veil of impenetrable mystery and romance—quite a Rider Haggard flavour about it, in fact. Certainly there must be some very mysterious secret to be guarded so strictly. There was no fear of the Seybert Commission or the Psychological Research Society sending committees to seek out and interview the new wonder-workers whose agent-general in Europe was Madame Blavatsky.

The two Mahatmas more especially at Madame's disposal were Mahatma Morya and Mahatma Koot Hoomi. At the headquarters at the Adyah, says Edmund Garrett,

in the "Occult Room" adjoining Madame's bed-chamber, hung the famous "Shrine," a sort of cupboard containing a fancy portrait in oils of the condescending Koot. This became associated with as many marvels as the image of a medieval saint. Suppose you are an intending Theosophist—a hesitating convert, especially a moneyed one, like Mr. Jacob Sassoon. You call at headquarters. You are shown round by Damodar, or by M. or Madame Coulomb, librarian and secretary. With natural curiosity you ask to gaze upon the Master's features. You are told of his indulgent concessions to deserving neophytes seeking for a sign. When the cupboard has been shut again, you are asked if there is anything you particularly desire from the Master. You indicate, not unnaturally, a message. It is about even chances whether the said message—reading generally not unlike Mr. Martin Tupper in his more oracular vein—is discovered in the cupboard immediately on opening the door, or descends from the ceiling on to the top of your head.<sup>1</sup>

General Morgan, a member of the Theosophical Society, records a miracle he saw performed at the shrine. He visited the headquarters to see the wonderful picture of Koot Hoomi. Madame Coulomb, who was in charge of the shrine, threw the doors open, and a china tray that was leaning against one of the doors fell, and was smashed to pieces on the hard chunan floor. While Madame was bewailing

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Garrett, *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, p. 15.



this unfortunate accident to a valuable article of Madame Blavatsky's, her husband was collecting the fragments. The General suggested some china cement to repair the damage. M. Coulomb was despatched for some. The broken pieces were collected, tied in a cloth, placed within the shrine, and the door locked. Mr. Damodar K. Mavalankar, Secretary of the Society, was present, and the General remarked that, if the Mahatmas considered it of sufficient importance, they would easily restore the broken article. About five minutes after this remark Mr. Damodar, who during this time seemed wrapped in a reverie, exclaimed: "I think there is an answer." The doors were opened, and sure enough the china tray was found to be whole and perfect; not a trace of the breakage was to be found upon it. The tray was accompanied by a note, which ran: "To the small audience present. Madame Coulomb has occasion to assure herself that the devil is neither so black nor so wicked as he is generally represented; the mischief is easily repaired."<sup>1</sup> This was a jocular reproof to Madame Coulomb for suggesting that many of the marvels might be due to the Devil.

The General, who came prepared to see marvels, was quite satisfied, and says: "I at once wrote across the note, stating that I was present when the tray was broken and immediately restored, dated and signed it, so that there should be no mistake in the matter." What could be more satisfactory

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Studies in Psychical Research*, p. 174.

proof for a miracle than this? Witnessed, attested, and signed, all within ten minutes, by a gentleman of the highest integrity and honour!

The report of these marvels soon reached England, and created the widest curiosity. The Psychical Research Society formed a committee to investigate the matter, and this committee, after receiving the oral and written statements of several important witnesses of these modern miracles, decided to send one of their members, Mr. R. Hodgson, to investigate on the spot. Briefly, this is what he discovered.

The shrine was fastened against the party wall between the "occult" room and Madame Blavatsky's bedroom. At the back of the shrine there was a sliding panel hidden by a mirror; behind this was a hole in the wall, communicating with Madame Blavatsky's bedroom; this hole being hidden on the other side by a sideboard, which also possessed a sliding panel at the back. So that, when M. Coulomb was despatched for the china cement to repair the tray, all he had to do was to slip into the adjoining room, remove the broken fragments from the shrine through the hole in the back, substitute the whole one in its place, accompanied by the note, and the trick was done. "It may be added," says Mr. Podmore, "that Mr. Hodgson was permitted to examine the tray in question; that he ascertained that Madame Coulomb had made purchases at a store in Madras on July 3, 1883, and that two articles of the kind had actually been sold on that day at the cost of two rupees and eight annas

the pair—a quite inconsiderable outlay, it will be admitted, for a miracle of this magnitude.”<sup>1</sup>

It should be stated that, while Madame Blavatsky was being lionized in Europe in 1884, a quarrel broke out at the Adyah, and M. and Madame Coulomb were dismissed, partly for having hinted to outsiders secrets connected with the shrine. An agitated telegram from Madame Blavatsky at Paris failed to heal the rupture, and in revenge Madame Coulomb gave to the press “a long series of letters in Madame’s hand teeming with veiled instructions to the Coulombs, which fitted in at every point with their accounts of jugglery at the Adyah.”<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Hodgson also inquired into the precipitated Mahatma letters. Says Mr. Edmund Garrett:—

These precious documents, which had been rained among the faithful with a copiousness almost amounting to garrulity, had been discredited already. The prosy and sometimes illiterate verbiage of the Tibetan sages was a severe trial to the enthusiasm of the more critical Theosophists even where it was apparently original. But it was too much of a good thing when a long doctrinal treatise, which Koot Hoomi had addressed to Mr. Sinnett, was found to be a gross plagiarism from a lecture by an American gentleman which had been reported in a Spiritualist paper a few months before. Nor did it mend matters when, after considerable delay, the illustrious Koot condescended to the newspaper arena, and wrote—we mean precipitated—an explanation which, for evasiveness and general “thinness,” is probably unique even in the records of convicted plagiarists.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Studies in Psychical Research*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Garrett, *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 19-20.

And worse was to follow, for the criticism which revealed Madame Blavatsky as the writer of the letters to Madame Coulomb found exactly the same characteristics in the compositions of the Mahatmas. "In a word," says Mr. Edmund Garrett, "it was declared that Koot Hoomi Lal Sing and Mahatma Morya were the same person, and that person Madame Blavatsky. When a missive from the Himalayas floated down into the neophyte's lap, it was Madame's own hand which had prepared it, though it was the no less useful if humbler function of M. Coulomb to jerk it from the ceiling at the critical moment with a string, or deftly pass it through the sliding panel into the closed shrine."<sup>1</sup>

It only needs to be added that, in the opinion of the two experts on handwriting, Messrs. Netherclift and Sims, both the Coulomb and Mahatma letters were "indisputably the authentic production of Madame Blavatsky."<sup>2</sup>

As Madame Blavatsky, when she was a Spiritualist, had protested that the Katie King exposure was "neither more nor less than a plot (now almost proved) of the Protestant Jesuitical Society called the Young Men's Christian Association," so she declared the publication of the incriminating Coulomb letters "was due to a conspiracy on the part of certain Christian missionaries, who had [as again was "almost proved"] paid 40,000 rupees to suborn false witnesses."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Garrett, pp. 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *Studies in Psychological Research*, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 188-89.

Madame Blavatsky certainly must have had but little acquaintance with either the Y.M.C.A. or Christian missionaries; for the Y.M.C.A. never—at least before the War—plotted anything more serious than how to provide amusements to divert its members from thinking, and to keep them in the fold. And as for missionaries parting with 40,000 rupees for any purpose whatever, the idea is too wildly improbable to be entertained.

“Whatever Theosophists may say now,” remarks Mr. Edmund Garrett, “the Society for Psychical Research was certainly not a hostile tribunal.” Dr. Hodgson, who conducted the inquiry, “declared that whatever prepossessions he may have had ‘were distinctly in favour of occultism and Madame Blavatsky.’”<sup>1</sup> Mr. Podmore, who was also a member of the Society, in explaining the Society’s attitude towards the Theosophic miracles, says: “When we found that some of these occurrences were vouched for by witnesses of good repute and good intelligence in other matters, we held that we should not be justified in summarily dismissing their evidence.....It seemed also not impossible that the accounts which had reached us of the *astral* journeys might prove to be slightly distorted versions of actual occurrences, analogous to those cases of thought transference with which we were already familiar. Moreover, to reject the evidences for these occurrences was, as it then seemed to us, to impute fraud to Colonel Olcott as well as to Mr. Damodar.

<sup>1</sup> *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, pp. 17-19.



Colonel Olcott we believed to be an honourable man, and Mr. Damodar was credibly alleged to be a Hindu of high caste, who had voluntarily sacrificed his patrimony on account of his connection with the Theosophical Society.”<sup>1</sup> In the event, it was found that there was collusion in the fraud on the part of Damodar, and that, “If Colonel Olcott’s honesty has not been impugned, the limits of his credulity have proved elastic beyond our anticipation. In fact, many of the leading members of the Theosophic cult present, in the light of this inquiry, a pleasantly ambiguous blend of charlatanry and simplicity.”<sup>2</sup>

Since the publication of Dr. Hodgson’s report, M. Solovyoff, a Russian of good social position and an author of some repute, has published, under the title of *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, an account of his connection with Madame Blavatsky, which emphatically confirms Dr. Hodgson’s exposure.

While in Paris, engaged in a study of the occult, in which he was inclined to believe, he came across a book by Madame Blavatsky; and, seeing a notice in the *Matin* of the arrival in Paris of Madame herself, he obtained an introduction to her from a friend, and called a few days later. He received a frank and kindly greeting. “At the end of a quarter of an hour,” says M. Solovyoff, “I was talking to Helena Petrovna as though she were an old friend, and all her homely, coarse appearance actually began to please me. And her eyes gazed

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Psychical Research*, pp. 186-87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187.

at me so graciously, and at the same time pierced me so attentively.”<sup>1</sup>

“She looked me straight in the eyes, and caressed me with her glance and her kindly smile.” Says M. Solovyoff: “I involuntarily liked her more and more. I was attracted to her by a feeling of instantaneous sympathy.” That, as in the case of Home, was the secret of her success. Further on, the same writer records: “In her quiet and good moments she was eminently sympathetic. There was within her a certain fascination, a kind of magnetism, which attracted to her with an irresistible force. Sympathy! it is a quality which you cannot translate into words; yet all men and women, old and young, on whom those great strange eyes had looked graciously, experienced the same thing.”<sup>2</sup>

During his first visit M. Solovyoff was favoured with the sound of the “astral bells.” This was upon the return of Madame Blavatsky to the room after a few minutes’ absence upon domestic duties, as she explained. During a later visit Madame dropped the little silver instrument responsible for these sounds. M. Solovyoff picked it up, but Madame snatched it out of his hand.

Finally, in the autumn of the following year (1885), at her invitation, he visited her at Wurzburg. He found her in ill-health, and depressed by the publication of the Hodgson report. She was alone, and seemed in need of sympathy. An accident

<sup>1</sup> V. S. Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess of Isis* (1895), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

precipitated the crisis. Going to a drawer, by Madame's direction, to get a photograph, M. Solovyoff discovered a packet of Chinese envelopes, already familiar to him as those in which the "astral" messages were conveyed from Thibet! Then Madame Blavatsky broke down and confessed all:—

What is 'one to do when in order to rule men it is necessary to deceive them, when in order to persuade them to let themselves be driven where you will you must promise them and show them playthings? Why, suppose my books and the *Theosophist* had been a thousand times more interesting and more serious, do you imagine I should have had any sort of success anywhere if behind all that there had not been the "phenomena"? I should have done simply nothing. I should have long ago starved to death. They would have crushed me, and it would never have even occurred to any one to think that I too was a living creature, that I too must eat and drink. But I have long, long since learnt to understand these dear people, and their stupidity sometimes affords me unbounded satisfaction. Why, you are not satisfied with my phenomena; but do you know that almost invariably the more simple, the more silly, and the more gross the "phenomenon," the more likely it is to succeed? I may tell you such stories about this some day as will split your sides with laughter—indeed, they will. The vast majority of people who are reckoned clever by themselves and others are inconceivably silly. If you only knew how many lions and eagles in every quarter of the globe have turned into asses at my whistle, and obediently wagged their great ears in time, as I have piped the tune! <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V. S. Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess of Isis* (1895), pp. 155-56.

Finally, she produced the "astral bell," and invited M. Solovyoff to co-operate with her in the manufacture of "astral" messages. "When she had found a man," continues M. Solovyoff, "whom she wished to win over and turn into her obedient tool, she worked on him by cordiality and sincerity. She tried to convince him of her devotion, her warm affection and friendliness; and then by virtue of these feelings she got him to do this or that for her. Everything was founded on personal relations and on feelings. With women these tactics worked wonders" (p. 73).

Her moral ideas were most primitive. Says the same writer:—

I am convinced that she honestly did not understand why I had parted with her and appeared among the number of her accusers. Her moral notions were so radically perverted that she had lost all grasp of certain ideas. She imagined that everything in the world was founded on personal relations, and that to this there was no exception. "What have I done to you—you?" "Others," that is to say, "I may cheat and ruin; I may abandon myself to every sacrilege, and huckster the greatest truths, but if I like you personally, and cannot take you in because you have seen through me, if it may yet be in my power to serve you in one way or another, then why do you betray me, and that to foreigners?" That is what she insinuated.<sup>1</sup>

Even her writings were a fraud. Her *Isis Unveiled* appears to be a work of amazing erudition and research. It is crammed with quotations from

<sup>1</sup> Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, pp. 185-86.

the ancient classics of Greece and Rome, from the early Church Fathers, from the old mystics and Cabalistic writings. But a competent scholar, Mr. Emmette Coleman, in an analysis of the work, says :—

In *Isis Unveiled*, published in 1877, I discovered some 2,000 passages copied from other books without proper credit. By careful analysis I found that in compiling *Isis* about 100 books were used. About 1,400 books are quoted from and referred to in this work; but from the 100 books which its author possessed she copied everything in *Isis* taken from and relating to the other 1,300. There are in *Isis* about 2,100 quotations from and references to books that were copied, at second-hand, from books other than the originals; and of this number only about 140 are credited to the books from which Madame Blavatsky copied them at second-hand—the truth being that these originals had evidently never been read by Madame Blavatsky. By this means many readers of *Isis*, and subsequently those of her *Secret Doctrine* and *Theosophical Glossary*, have been misled into thinking Madame Blavatsky an enormous reader, possessed of vast erudition; while the fact is her reading was very limited, and her ignorance was profound in all branches of knowledge. The books utilized in compiling *Isis* were nearly all current nineteenth-century literature.....Our author made great pretensions to Cabalistic learning; but every quotation from and every allusion to the Cabala, in *Isis* and all her later works, were copied at second-hand from certain books containing scattered quotations from Cabalistic writings.

The *Secret Doctrine* is ostensibly based upon certain stanzas, claimed to have been translated by Madame Blavatsky from the *Book of Dzyan*—the oldest book in the world, written in a language unknown to philology. The *Book of Dzyan* was the work of Madame Blavatsky—a compilation, in her



own language, from a variety of sources, embracing the general principles of the doctrines and dogmas taught in the *Secret Doctrine*. I find in this "oldest book in the world" statements copied from nineteenth-century books, and in the usual blundering manner of Madame Blavatsky.<sup>1</sup>

So Madame Blavatsky first had the audacity to forge a whole book and claim it to be the most ancient book in the world, and then to found another book upon the teaching contained in this literary forgery! I do not know of any more impudent imposture in the whole of literature.

The most distinguished convert made by Madame Blavatsky was Mrs. Annie Besant, who is now President of the Theosophical Society. Mrs. Besant began life as a ritualistic High Churchwoman, the wife of a clergyman. She then went to the other extreme, becoming an Atheist, and joining the National Secular Society. Next she became a Socialist, and ultimately a Theosophist. Her changes have been chameleon-like in their diversity, and there are not wanting those who prophesy that Mrs. Besant will ultimately find peace in the bosom of the Holy Roman Church.

In all her divagations Mrs. Besant has always been a follower of somebody else. It is the personal factor that has always swayed her in intellectual matters. The heroic figure of Charles Bradlaugh, defying gods and men in his titanic battle for liberty

<sup>1</sup> The Society for Psychical Research translated and published Solovyoff's *Modern Priestess of Isis*, and included Mr. Emmette Coleman's analysis of Madame Blavatsky's work in an appendix at the end, from which I have quoted.

of speech and publication, captured her imagination and sympathy. She heard him lecture, and immediately gave her allegiance, under the spell of Bradlaugh's glowing eloquence.

Mrs. Besant has been a voluminous writer during *all* phases of her diverse mental wanderings, but she has never contributed a single original idea to any of the causes which she has at different times supported. She has adopted her opinions—and discarded them—like suits of clothes. Her intellect is at the mercy of her emotions. Such women are the natural prey of charlatans like Madame Blavatsky, who know full well how to bind them in the spell of their fascination.

Now, if the Mahatma missives were genuine and were really, as Madame Blavatsky asserted, "precipitated" by "astral force" from the Himalayan Mountains by the mysterious Mahatmas, then they should have continued to arrive after the death of Madame Blavatsky.

Madame Blavatsky died on May 8, 1891, and three months later (on August 30, 1891) Mrs. Besant made the sensational announcement to her old followers at the Hall of Science that she had received messages from the Mahatmas. Her words were: "You have known me for sixteen and a-half years. You have never known me tell a lie. ('No, never,' and loud cheers.) I tell you that since Madame Blavatsky left I have had letters in the same handwriting as the letters which she received. (Sensation.) Unless you think dead persons can write, surely that is a remarkable fact." In an

interview published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 1, 1891, Mrs. Besant pledged herself definitely to "precipitation." In answer to a question as to whether the letters came through the post, she declared: "No, I did not receive the letters through the post; the letters I receive from the Mahatmas are 'precipitated.'" As Mr. Edmund Garrett observes:—

Mrs. Besant did not overrate the extent of her public credit. She *was* implicitly believed by many who would not have troubled their heads at all over an assertion of Madame Blavatsky's. A "boom" was the immediate result—the second big boom in the Society's history. Mrs. Besant had the satisfaction of seeing her statement honoured with a salvo of leading articles. "Can it be," the *Daily Chronicle* exclaimed, "that there are things in heaven and earth which philosophy and science have not yet dreamed of?" (*Daily Chronicle*, August 31). And it opened its columns to a flood of correspondence on Theosophy and things occult. Day after day a crop of letters attested the public appetite for the marvellous.<sup>1</sup>

Papers that had previously maintained a dead silence about Mrs. Besant's Atheistic propaganda now filled columns about her adhesion to supernaturalism, because it countenanced the masses in their superstitions.

At the time of Madame Blavatsky's death, Colonel Olcott, the President of the Theosophical Society, was in India. Mr. William Q. Judge, the Vice-

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Garrett, *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, p. 25, to which reliable and entertaining work I am indebted (thanks to Miss E. M. Vance, Secretary of the National Secular Society) for the narrative of Theosophic history after the death of Madame Blavatsky.

President, was in America, and Mrs. Besant was in London. With the death of Madame Blavatsky the Society's one link with the Mahatmas seemed to have been broken. The "Masters" allowed a whole "fortnight to elapse without giving any sign that they survived the decease of their high-priestess." The renewal of the "astral post" coincided, strange to say, with the arrival in this country of Mr. Judge, who, upon receiving the announcement of Madame Blavatsky's decease, telegraphed: "Do nothing till I come."

Of the machinations of Mr. Judge; of the manner in which he schemed to supplant Colonel Olcott in the leadership of the Society; of how Colonel Olcott, who had swallowed all the Blavatsky miracles without winking, suddenly developed a previously unsuspected and very keen critical faculty when he found that Mr. Judge was designated by the Mahatmas as the successor of Madame Blavatsky in place of himself; of how Olcott was the means of exposing the new Mahatma missives as the fabrication of Mr. Judge—all these things are set forth in inimitable style by Mr. Edmund Garrett in his *Isis Very Much Unveiled*.

At a Judicial Committee gathered from the ends of the earth to discuss the matter, Mrs. Besant recanted, in the following words, her sensational claim at the Hall of Science:—

.....When I publicly said that I had received, after H. P. Blavatsky's death, letters in the writing that H. P. Blavatsky had been accused of forging, I referred to letters given to me by Mr. Judge, and

as they were in the well-known script I never dreamed of challenging their source. I know now that they were not written or precipitated by the Master, and that they were done by Mr. Judge; but I also believe that the gist of these messages was psychically received, and that Mr. Judge's error lay in giving them to me in a script written by himself and not saying so.....Having been myself mistaken, I in turn misled the public.<sup>1</sup>

Apparently it never occurred to Mrs. Besant that it was her duty to return to the Hall of Science and acquaint the audience with the manner in which she had been deluded. At any rate, she never did so. The moral of this sordid story, and indeed of the whole history of Spiritualism, is that, however truthful, upright, and honest deponents may be, their testimony is worthless as a proof of the supernatural.

<sup>1</sup> Garrett, *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, p. 63.



## CHAPTER XI

### EUSAPIA PALLADINO

Mankind, when they grow enthusiastic, mistake their hopes and imaginations for evidence of truth, and run like sheep after every new pretender who professes to hold the key of the mystery which they are so passionately anxious to penetrate.....

People in search of the miraculous never like to be disappointed.  
.....

Belief in the marvellous does not rise from evidence, and will not yield to it. There is the easy answer, that infidels are answered according to the impiety of their hearts, that the gods will not and perhaps cannot work miracles in the presence of sceptics.—J. A. FROUDE, *A Cagliostro of the Second Century, Short Studies on Great Subjects* (1894), vol. iv, pp. 436-454-473.

WE shall now proceed to study the methods of Eusapia Palladino, the last and, if we count by the number of great scientists she deceived, the greatest of all spirit mediums. For, although she had been detected in fraud more than once, it must be remembered that she had not the advantage of Home, who was one of the first in the field and operated before the many discreditable exposures had taken place and rendered the public rather more sceptical of these performances. Even with this disadvantage, Eusapia succeeded in deluding a greater number of scientists than all the other mediums put together. Among others who have testified to the genuineness of her phenomena are Sir Oliver Lodge, Professor Richet, Professor Morselli, Camille Flammarion, Professor Lombroso, Professor Brofferio,

Professor Schiaparelli, Dr. Ochorowicz, and Mr. Myers, besides many others who thought that her phenomena were partly genuine and partly trickery.

By the year 1890, through the frequent exposures of fraud, says Podmore, "the subject fell into increasing disrepute," and the Psychical Society "reached the broad conclusion that the phenomena degenerated precisely in the ratio in which the precautions against trickery were rendered more effective, until sometimes a point was reached at which, the safeguards being absolute, the manifestations ceased altogether.....Then, in 1892, Eusapia Palladino appeared on the scene. Eusapia—for by universal consent the gifted Neapolitan, she too an artist, has been assigned a place among her immortal fellow-countrymen who are known through the ages by their Christian names alone—Eusapia, then, is an Italian peasant woman, who from early youth has been possessed of mediumistic powers."

Eusapia Palladino was born and bred in the slums of Naples, and married, early in life, a travelling conjurer, who no doubt taught her the tricks by means of which she afterwards became famous, or notorious. First investigated at Milan in 1892, she practised as a spirit medium until her death in 1918; and, although she had been several times exposed, she retained the faith of several scientific men.

Among those who assisted at the investigation at Milan in 1892 were Professor Brofferio and M. Schiaparelli, Director of the Astronomical Observatory in Milan, who both signed a report expressing

their conviction that some of the things witnessed could not be attributed to normal agency.<sup>1</sup> Professor Richet, who attended some of the sittings, though attaching great weight to the phenomena which he had observed, was not completely satisfied. Therefore, with a view to further investigation, Professor Richet, in the summer of 1894, invited Sir Oliver Lodge, Mr. W. H. Myers, Dr. Ochorowicz, and one or two others, to his own house in the Ile Roubaud, in the Mediterranean, and later at Carqueiranne, to meet Eusapia again.

The sittings were held in "semi-darkness." The phenomena were of the usual type, and consisted mainly of the movement of furniture at a certain distance from the table, the sounding of musical instruments, grasps and touches felt by the sitters, while Eusapia's hands and feet were believed to be secured by those sitting on either side of her. Professor Richet, Sir Oliver Lodge, and Mr. Myers were convinced that some of the phenomena were due to supernormal agency. "Among the phenomena for which Sir Oliver Lodge specially vouched 'as being the most easily and securely observed, and as being amply sufficient in themselves to establish a scientifically unrecognized truth,' were the movements of a distant chair, visible in the moonlight, bulging of curtain, sounding of notes of untouched piano and accordion, movement and uplifting of a heavy table, and other purposive movements of apparently distant objects; graspings and pattings

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Studies in Psychical Research*, p. 183. Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural*, p. 80.

of hand, arm, and back, while the head, hands, and feet of the medium were under complete control and nowhere near the place touched. Further, the rude outline of a large face was seen against the background of the window; little lights like glow-worms were seen to flit about; some scent like verbena appeared on the medium's hands; and blue marks were made on the under surface of a table previously examined and found clean, and on part of Richet's shirt-front under his waistcoat."<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion, after the *séance*, Eusapia took Professor Richet's finger and drew it along a clean sheet of paper. The finger-nail was seen to leave a thick blue mark on the clean white paper, as if made with a blue pencil! The amazing thing is that intelligent and clever men could bring themselves to believe that spirits, who are supposed to consist of pure intellect released from all earthly matter, and far transcending us in knowledge and power, could perform such childish antics as making blue marks under tables, on shirt-fronts, and on paper. Did they believe that spirits carry blue pencils behind their ears, ready for such tricks as these?

It should be stated that all the investigators positively asserted that the hands and feet of the medium were under control during the phenomena. Nevertheless, when the report of the sittings reached Dr. Hodgson—the exposé of the Blavatsky fraud—he pointed out that the precautions described did not

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, pp. 93-94.

exclude trickery, and declared that all the phenomena "described could be accounted for on the assumption that Eusapia could get a hand or foot free." Mr. Myers, Sir O. Lodge, and Professor Richet, each replied at length to Hodgson's criticisms, and all declared that they were fully aware of the dangers indicated. "And really," says Podmore, "to impute negligence on this point to Richet and his fellow investigators would almost seem equivalent to imputing imbecility."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, neither Sir Oliver nor his colleagues were at all shaken in their confidence by Dr. Hodgson's arguments, and to prove their conviction a further series of sittings was arranged for the following summer at Mr. Myers's house at Cambridge, to which Dr. Hodgson, then living at Boston, in America, was especially invited. The result was the discovery that the tricks were performed exactly as Dr. Hodgson had stated in his criticism. Myers, in communicating the results to the Society for Psychical Research, said: "I cannot doubt that we observed much conscious and deliberate fraud of a kind which must have needed long practice to bring to its present level of skill. Nor can I find any excuse for her fraud (assuming that such excuse would be valid) in the attitude of mind of the persons, several of them distinguished in the world of science, who assisted in this inquiry. Their attitude was a fair and open one; in all cases they showed patience, and in several cases the impression

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, p. 97.



first made on their minds was distinctly favourable. ....I do not think there is adequate reason to suppose that any of the phenomena at Cambridge were genuine.”<sup>1</sup>

However, Sir O. Lodge and Richet still maintained their belief in Eusapia, and “a few years later, after witnessing some more of Eusapia’s performances in Paris, Myers returned to his original allegiance, and formally avowed his renewed belief in the supernatural character of Eusapia’s mediumship.”<sup>2</sup>

But, after the exposure of systematic fraud at Cambridge, the Council of the Society for Psychical Research declined to proceed with any further investigation of Eusapia’s powers, and her subsequent performances were confined to foreign investigators. In 1907 she held sittings with Doctors Herlitzska, Charles Foa, and Aggazzotti, the phenomena at which included “the breaking-up of a small table before their eyes, and the impression, by radio-activity, of four finger-marks on a sensitized plate wrapped in black paper—which they regarded as unquestionably supernormal.”

The most elaborate investigation was undertaken by the Institut Général Psychologique of Paris, which, between the years 1905 and 1907, held no fewer than forty-three sittings with Eusapia. “Of the investigators the best known are M. and Madame Curie. The circle seems to have included several other competent physicists; and the apparatus employed in the inquiry was as well devised as it was,

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 98.

unfortunately, for the most part unproductive.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, when the tests were too rigid, when they could not be got round or got over, then the sitting was “unproductive”—that is, Eusapia did nothing. As Podmore observes: “Eusapia tolerates human ‘control’—she understands men and women; but she has a rooted antipathy to scientific apparatus of any kind.”

And again says the same writer:—

Her feet are generally controlled by being placed over or under the feet of the controller-observer on either side. Unfortunately, the Committee found that she suffered from a painful corn on the right foot, so that this foot had generally to be placed on the left foot of her neighbour instead of under it. As to her hands, she practically insists on the method of control already described; one hand may, as a rule, be clasped, but the other must be free, resting wholly or partly on the hand of her neighbour. This preference of hers is due, as would appear from her statement to the Committee of the *Institut*, to cutaneous hyperæsthenia, which makes it difficult for her to tolerate pressure on the hand for long together.<sup>2</sup>

We shall see the reason for this later. However, “the investigators loyally complied with the conditions imposed, but sought in various ways to devise tests which should still be valid. The really valuable part of their report is the successive rejections or evasions of their tests by Eusapia.”<sup>3</sup> One of the phenomena witnessed was the levitation, or floating, of a stool in the air. Eusapia allowed photographs

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

to be taken of this phenomenon on condition that she gave the signal for working the camera. "Three of the photographs," says Podmore, "taken from a position facing the medium, show the little stool against the background of the dark curtain, apparently suspended in the air over the medium. But a fourth photograph, taken simultaneously on the last occasion from the side, shows that the stool was actually supported in quite normal fashion by Eusapia's head. Unfortunately, Eusapia saw this last photograph, and the cameras, which henceforth lay in wait to right and left, were baulked of their prey, for the little stool was levitated no more."

The Committee of the Institut Général Psychologique of Paris also tested Eusapia's alleged power of moving a balance without touching it. A small machine like a letter-weigher was employed, says Podmore. "It was surrounded with a wooden frame, so as to prevent the use of a hair or other fraudulent device. Eusapia tried it with the wooden covering and failed; tried it with a linen covering and failed. All the protecting apparatus was then removed. Eusapia put her hands on either side of the scale, and it went down; and the onlookers could not find out how it was done."<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately it was discovered that the trick was done by means of a hair attached to Eusapia's little fingers, so that when she placed her hands on each side of the scale she had only to depress her two little fingers to bring the hair down on the scale.

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, p. 108.

The experiments were conducted in such a dim light that the hair was invisible.

The conclusion arrived at by the Institut Committee was that Eusapia undoubtedly resorted to fraud when it was possible to do so, but that some of the phenomena—the movement of the table and stool, for instance—they could not explain. They do not attribute these phenomena to any spiritual force, but to some physical force of the nature of electricity emanating from the body of Eusapia. As Mr. Podmore remarks: “The great defect of their report is that, while they cannot explain some of the things seen and done, they have not given us a chance of explaining them. They do not publish the shorthand notes of the *séances*.....We see that on this particular occasion the Committee believe that the control was adequate; but then we know that it is Eusapia’s plan to induce this belief, and we know or suspect that in many previous cases the belief has been ill-founded. On the positive side this report does not advance the matter at all. Such a condensed description is of just so much value as the ordinary observer’s account of a conjurer’s trick. It tells us only that the witnesses did not see through the trick; but it does not tell us how it was done.”<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that the Society for Psychical Research had declined to undertake any further investigation of Eusapia’s powers after the Cambridge exposure, so successfully did she impose

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, p. 112.

on numerous foreign investigators (many of them eminent men of science) during the next twelve years that in the autumn of 1908 they appointed a committee of three to test again her claims to supernatural powers. Of their qualifications Mr. Podmore remarks: "Mr. Hereward Carrington is an amateur conjurer, who has for several years made a special study of the tricks of American mediums. His book, *The Psychical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, is the standard authority on these fraudulent performances. The Hon. Everard Fielding and Mr. Baggally have also to their credit years of practical experience in the same field. Mr. Baggally, again, is a practical conjurer, and Mr. Fielding's humorous exposures of the tricks of British and foreign mediums are familiar to all members of the Society for Psychical Research. On the ground of personal qualifications and practical experience a more competent Committee could, since the death of Dr. Hodgson, scarcely have been selected."<sup>1</sup>

The sittings, eleven in all, were held in Naples during November and December, 1908; and it is no small tribute to the genius of Eusapia that she succeeded in duping all three of these well-qualified and able gentlemen, and obtaining their testimony to her supernormal powers. Mr. Carrington, in particular, was so impressed by Eusapia's performance that he actually acted as her manager when she left Italy for America. But a year later

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, p. 114.



(December, 1909) she was to experience utter and irretrievable defeat at the hands of Professor Munsterberg, in New York.

To understand properly what happened it should be explained that, before giving a *séance*, a corner of the room was partitioned off by a pair of black curtains, so as to form a sort of triangular cabinet. Inside this cabinet were placed a stool, one or two musical instruments, and any other articles the spirits required to announce their presence and perform their antics. In front of this alcove was placed a table, thirty-three inches long by twenty inches wide, endways to the curtains. At this end Eusapia sat, with her back to the curtains, the investigators sitting round the table, linking hands, and those on either side of the medium undertaking the control of her hands and feet. These were invariably the arrangements made by Eusapia before giving a *séance*.

Upon this occasion Professor Munsterberg sat at her left side and Mr. Carrington at her right. The "John" referred to in the following description is the name of the spirit supposed to have been invoked by Eusapia, "her wonders to perform." Probably he is the "John King," the spirit of a deceased pirate, who has laboured so assiduously for the mediums for the last fifty years. Professor Munsterberg describes what happened as follows:—

We had her under strictest supervision. Her left hand grasped my left hand, her right hand was held by her right neighbour, her left foot rested on my foot while her right was pressing the foot of her other neighbour. For an hour the regulation per-

formance had gone on. But now we sat in the darkened room in the highest expectancy while Mr. Carrington begged John to touch my arm and then to lift the table in the cabinet behind her; and John really came. He touched me distinctly on my hip and then on my arm, and at last he pulled my sleeve at the elbow. I plainly felt the thumb and fingers. It was most uncanny.

And, finally, John was to lift the table in the cabinet. We held both her hands, we felt both her feet, and yet the table three feet behind her began to scratch the floor, and we expected it to be lifted. But instead there suddenly came a wild yelling scream. It was such a scream as I have never heard before in my life, not even in Sarah Bernhardt's most thrilling scenes.

What had happened? Neither the medium nor Mr. Carrington had the slightest idea that a man was lying flat on the floor and had succeeded in slipping noiselessly like a snail below the curtain into the cabinet. I had told him that I expected wires stretched out from her body, and he looked out for them. What a surprise when he saw that she had simply freed her foot from her shoe and with an athletic backward movement of the leg was reaching out and fishing with her toes for the guitar and the table in the cabinet! And then, lying on the floor, he grasped her foot and caught her heel with a firm hand, and she responded with that wild scream which indicated that she knew that at last she was trapped and her glory shattered. Her achievement had been splendid; she had lifted her unshod foot to the height of my arm when she touched me under cover of the curtain, without changing in the least the position of her body. When her foot played thumb and finger, the game was also neat throughout. To be sure, I remember, before she was to reach out for the table behind her, she suddenly felt the need of touching my left hand too, and for that purpose she leaned heavily over the

table at which we were sitting. She said that she must do it because her spiritual fluid had become too strong and the touch would relieve her. As a matter of course, in leaning forward with the upper half of her body she was able to push her foot further backward and thus to reach the light table, which probably stood a few inches too far away.

After this scream, at least let us not repeat the ridiculous excuse that she sometimes uses tricks when by chance genuine phenomena do not arise, but that she can perform the same acts at other times by mere spiritual powers. No. We had here the perfectly typical performance. Everything occurred in exactly the same style as in previous *séances*, and the conditions of supervision were the best which she allows at all. To put your foot on hers is never allowed, as the poor woman has a nervous "weakness" in her instep. Thus the only allowed supervision of her feet is in being sure all the time that her foot is on yours. I did indeed feel her shoe all the time. When the scream occurred and her foot was caught, I distinctly felt that her shoe was pressing my foot. A hook on the right shoe probably pressed down the empty left shoe. If her foot had not been caught, that performance would have been the best in the whole *séance*, and the cabinet mysteries worked in our presence would never have been under stricter conditions. Moreover, this foot performance without any motion of the upper half of the body evidently presupposes a continued and perfect training. Here she was trapped for the first time in an act which cannot possibly be explained as an accidental occurrence; such marvellous athletics must be explained as a regular life-work. Her greatest wonders are absolutely nothing but fraud and humbug; this is no longer a theory, but a proven fact.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor Hugo Munsterberg, *Problems of To-day* (1910), pp. 142-43-44.

If the man had not been concealed in the cabinet, Professor Munsterberg would never have been able to detect, or even suspect, the manner in which the tricks were performed. He himself frankly admits: "I do not refer to any philosophical or theoretical conviction, but to a practical one, that I myself am entirely unfit for such an investigation. There the public is usually under the influence of a curious illusion. Most people think that a scientist is especially adapted to carrying on such an inquiry, and if a great scholar becomes convinced of the genuineness of the performance the public looks on that as a strong argument. I am inclined to think that scholars are especially poor witnesses in such a case." And, as he further points out, the scientist in his laboratory has not the slightest fear that Nature will play tricks or resort to fraud, and places the same trust in the honesty of his students. "If he weighs his chemical substances, he is not accustomed to watch whether one of the boys has a scheme to pull down the lever of the scale.....And now he, with his bland *naiveté* and his training in blind confidence, is again and again called to make inquiries which would demand a detective and a prestidigitator. Moreover, the best scientific work in one field is not the slightest guarantee for good observation in another field. It is often remarkable to what a degree a man who is a great scholar in one division may be not only ignorant, but uneducated in his attitude, silly in his judgment, and foolish in his conclusions in fields which lie outside of his interests"—a fact we have amply demonstrated.

I am convinced that, if something entirely new and mysterious in phenomena were to-day launched in London, the public would flop down, and the great and glorious newspapers would again rave about there being more in heaven and earth than we dream of in our philosophy.

We cannot do better than end this part of our subject with the testimony of a convinced Spiritualist, Mr. Hereward Carrington, who, as we have seen, acted for a time as Eusapia Palladino's manager:—

There can be no doubt, then, that the history of Spiritualism is saturated with fraud, and that the vast majority of the phenomena obtained through mediums are fraudulent in character.....The net result of the investigations conducted by the English Society for Psychical Research was to produce the conviction that no results obtained through *professional* mediums were to be trusted, so long as the conditions rendered fraud *possible*; and, further, that practically all *professional* mediums are frauds! "There does not exist, and there never has existed, a professional medium of any note who has not been convicted of trickery or fraud," says J. N. Maskelyne (*The Supernatural*, p. 183). And, in case Mr. Maskelyne may be considered a prejudiced witness in such matters, it may be stated that the American Society for Psychical Research was unable to find any medium who could produce satisfactory phenomena under test conditions, and stated that "it is, in their opinion, inadvisable to undertake further investigation in regard to professional mediums, inasmuch as all the materializing *séances* yet attended by them have been held under conditions which rendered any scientific investigation impossible.".....It may almost be said that the S. P. R. has never succeeded in obtaining evidence for a single genuine physical phenomena in its whole



career, while the number of fraudulent mediums it has unearthed is amazing! They have been no more successful in their day than the Seybert Commission was in its; and it is certainly a suspicious fact that, so soon as strict and reliable "tests" are insisted upon, and no opportunity given the medium to produce the phenomena by fraudulent means, the phenomena altogether cease.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hereward Carrington, *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism*, pp. 9-10.

## CHAPTER XII

### SCIENCE, TELEPATHY, AND COMMUNION WITH THE DEAD

THE contest between science and the mediums—resembling that between the art expert and the faker of antiquities, or the safe-maker and the burglar—has been decided in favour of science; that is, for all reasonable people with an adequate knowledge of the facts. With the fall of Eusapia the last of the great wonder-workers disappeared from public view; even her one-time faithful defender, Sir Oliver Lodge, had not a word to say for her, and did not even mention her name in the whole four hundred pages of his latest Spiritualistic book, *Raymond*.

The defenders of Spiritualism have, for the most part, retreated from their old positions, leaving the false beards, dirty muslin, rag dolls, phosphorized oil, and so on, in the hands of the enemy. They have retreated to what they consider stronger and more easily defended positions. It will be our task to show that the new defences are not less vulnerable than the old.

The latest form of Spiritualism relies on Telepathy, or the power claimed for certain people of being able to communicate with other people at a distance by means of the mind. Starting with this

belief, the Spiritualists go a step further. They say: "If mind can communicate with mind irrespective of distance, why should not the mind survive the death of the body and continue to communicate with the living?" And they further claim, not only that it may be possible, but that it is so; that they do receive messages which indubitably come from spirits of the dead.

Sir Oliver himself came to believe in Spiritualism by way of Telepathy. In an article contributed to the *Strand Magazine*, entitled "How I Became Convinced of the Survival of the Dead," Sir Oliver says: "I gradually became convinced of the reality of experimental Telepathy between persons in each other's proximity, though not necessarily in contact with each other.....Concerning the immortality of the soul, I was at that time agnostic, and probably quite sceptical. Nor did the question arouse any emotional feeling in my mind. I did not think that we could know, and I felt satisfied with the fact, whatever it was."<sup>1</sup> After becoming convinced "of the reality of thought-transference," Sir Oliver joined the Society for Psychical Research, where he became the close friend of F. W. H. Myers, the author of *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, that enormous compilation of superstition dealing with hypnotism, mediumship, trances, death-warnings, hallucinations, and telepathy. "Under Myers's guidance," says Sir Oliver, "I perceived that Telepathy itself, in so far as it demonstrated

<sup>1</sup> *Strand Magazine* (June, 1917), pp. 564-65.

mental action outside the ordinary channels and organs of sense, implied some promise and constituted some indication of the persistent existence of mind and memory after the bodily vehicle or instrument had been sloughed off." Although not absolutely convinced, says Sir Oliver, "my mind became open to the evidence if it should be forthcoming." The evidence, in Sir Oliver's opinion, was provided by the famous American medium Mrs. Piper, who crossed the Atlantic on a visit to this country in 1889, at the invitation of Mr. Myers, and with whom Sir Oliver held several sittings. "It now began to appear to me," he proceeds, "that although a brain and nerve mechanism and a muscular organism were as needful as ever for effective and demonstrable communication between mind and mind, yet it was possible to use such an organism vicariously, and identity of instrument was not absolutely essential so long as some physiological instrument was available. In other words, the brain and organism of a living person might be utilized by deceased personalities whose own body had ceased to work. Mrs. Piper went into a trance, and seemed, as it were, to vacate her body for a time. In this condition it appeared temporarily revived, not by her own personality, but by another; and this secondary personality, or whatever it ought to be called, was able to manage what they call 'the machine,' so that through her bodily mechanism communications were received from persons deceased, but still apparently mentally active and retaining their personal memory and affection,

though now able to display them only in a fragmentary and imperfect manner" (pp. 565-66).

It is quite intelligible, in theory at least, that the brain might be capable of sending out waves of energy comparable with those used in wireless telegraphy, although there is no conclusive evidence that one brain has ever communicated with another at a distance by this means. But how is one brain to communicate with another when one of them is dead and turned to ashes? One can as easily believe that two wireless stations could continue to communicate after their destruction. And as for the medium "vacating her body for a time" and allowing it to be possessed by spirits of the dead, why, this is going back to the Middle Ages, when the Church exorcized evil spirits from the possessed; or to the first century, when devils were cast out of men into pigs!

We have now to consider the evidence for Telepathy, and then the evidence for communication with the dead. It will be admitted that Telepathy is not a fact of every-day experience. The diplomatist has not the slightest fear that any one will read his secret thoughts, and the criminal makes his plans in similar security. Millions are invested in telegraph cables and wireless telegraphy, which would be rendered useless if mind could communicate with mind regardless of distance. Many have claimed to possess the power, but there is not a single living person to-day claiming this power who will consent to be tested by a competent scientific committee.



The last public exponents of thought-reading were the Zancigs, who excited a great deal of interest with their performance in London, at the Alhambra Music Hall, during December, 1906. Mr. and Mrs. Zancig came over from America, like the Davenport Brothers, Slade, Home, Mrs. Piper, and many others. The English climate does not appear suitable for rearing really great mediums; we import them. Eusapia Palladino was an Italian, and Madame Blavatsky a Russian; and if we are to have Tariff Reform the Government might do worse than put a heavy tax on these imports.

The Zancigs claimed to be able to read each other's thoughts. Mr. Zancig asserted that what he saw Mrs. Zancig saw; that, in fact, they were two minds with but a single thought. They had previously toured the United States without exciting more than ordinary attention, but in London their success was remarkable. This was due to the late Mr. Stead, who wrote in his *Review of Reviews* (December, 1906): "I can say without hesitation that the Zancigs at the Alhambra Music Hall gave a more conclusive demonstration of the power of Telepathy than is to be found in all the literature of the subject. On each of the two occasions on which I experimented with them in private the results were the same as those witnessed by anybody at the Alhambra. The only difference was that at the experiments in private I had ample opportunity to impose conditions which rendered fraud or trickery impossible."

Mr. Sinnett also testified to their powers, and

Mr. Harold Begbie recorded his conviction that the Zancigs obtained their results by the aid of hypnotism; but it is doubtful if he knew what he was talking about, for how hypnotism can enable one person to read another's thoughts is past all understanding. But the usual Nemesis waited upon the Zancigs' initial success. Mr. Stuart Cumberland, the cleverest exponent of thought-reading, wrote to the *Daily Chronicle* (December 31, 1906), declaring that the Zancigs used a code of words and signs, and that if they wished to demonstrate their power of thought-transmission they must submit to test conditions under which they would be unable to use a code either verbal or by sign. Upon this the *Chronicle* tried to arrange for a test meeting with Mr. Zancig. They were met with an absolute refusal; no test meeting could be arranged for love or money. When Mr. Stead wished to test their powers, they received him with open arms; but Mr. Stead did not require any proof of Telepathy—he was a firm believer already. When Mr. Stuart Cumberland, who does not believe in Telepathy—and, what is more, knows all the tricks of the so-called thought-readers—asked for a test, he was indignantly refused.

Mr. Maskelyne also wrote to the *Daily Chronicle*, suggesting that, if there was anything in the nature of thought-transference in the Zancigs' performance, "the whole matter can be settled in five minutes." But this opportunity of establishing their claims was likewise ignored. Soon afterwards the *Chronicle* published part of their code, and members of the

audience began to give correct answers before Madame Zancig could reply. Mr. Zancig publicly admitted from the stage of the Alhambra that "if it were our misfortune to lose our sight and hearing we should not be able to work,"<sup>1</sup> and the bubble of their reputation was pricked. Even Mr. Stead began to hedge, and explained that the Zancigs used *Telepathy and a code*; the code being used only to relieve the strain on their minds! This recalls Voltaire's observation, that incantations and arsenic had been known to destroy flocks of sheep. One of their most mystifying tricks was the ability of Mrs. Zancig to read a passage from any book of which Mr. Zancig had been provided with a copy, and upon which he had concentrated his mind. At Cambridge they utterly failed to repeat this trick, because they were provided with two books which, unlike ordinary books, had unnumbered pages; therefore Mr. Zancig could not convey by code of word or sign the number of the page and passage which he wished Mrs. Zancig to read. The Zancigs were the last public exponents of Telepathy, or thought-transference, pretending to possess supernatural powers.

In 1882 the Society for Psychical Research was founded, with the object of investigating the phenomena of Spiritualism, Hypnotism, and the occult in general. Mr. Frederick Myers, in founding the Society, said that "its primary aim" was "the establishment of thought-transference."<sup>2</sup> The Society

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Chronicle*, January 3, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Dr. I. L. Tuckett; *Bedrock*, July, 1912.

has been in existence for thirty-seven years, and has conducted an enormous amount of investigation into occult phenomena, the record of which is contained in the twenty-eight yearly volumes published by the Society, each containing, on an average, between five hundred and six hundred pages—two of them contain seven hundred pages—to say nothing of a monthly journal circulated among members only. It is to this enormous record that Sir Oliver Lodge is always referring the public for proofs of Telepathy. Yet the public do not have access to these volumes; and, even if they had, are they able to read, analyse, and give a verdict upon such a mass of printed matter on an abstruse subject?

Sir Oliver admits, and deplores, the scepticism and indifference of the scientific world, no less than of the average man, to the reality of Telepathy. If the evidence available is so conclusive, why is it that the great majority of scientific men are not convinced of the possibility of thought-transference? Sir Oliver Lodge attributes this attitude of the scientific world to pure prejudice, and regards himself as a modern Galileo, fighting for the truth against a scientific world blinded by prejudice and dogma.

As we have remarked, there are very few who possess the leisure, capacity, or inclination to sift this mass of material, to say nothing of other records. The late Mr. Frank Podmore was a member of the Society; his honesty and capacity are recognized by both sides in the disputé; he published many works dealing with the subject; and he may be said to

have spent his life in seeking evidence of a continued existence after death ; but in the end he could not decide for or against, and gave a Scotch verdict of " Not proven." He committed suicide, but whether through disappointment or for other reasons is not publicly known. Dr. Ivor Tuckett, another member of the Society, categorically denies the existence of Telepathy, or communication with the dead ; so do Sir Ray Lankester and Sir Bryan Donkin, who have not only studied the records, but have taken part in the actual investigations. Either of these gentlemen is the equal of Sir Oliver Lodge in sincerity, intellectual power, and knowledge of the subject. What is the use, then, of Sir Oliver pretending that the opposition to Telepathy and Survival proceeds from irrational and blind prejudice ? As Dr. Ivor Tuckett observes in reply to Professor Barrett : " The fact remains that several of the more critical researchers who have thoroughly examined the evidence have ultimately come to the conclusion that the case for Telepathy is completely unproven. Thus Professor Simon Newcombe, first President of the American S. P. R.—Society for Psychical Research—(founded in 1884), expressed his mature opinion twenty-five years later (1909), just before his death, that there was no convincing evidence for Telepathy, and that ' Nothing has been brought out by the researches of the Psychical Society and its able collaborators except what we should expect to find in the ordinary course of nature.' " <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. I. L. Tuckett, *Bedrock*, July, 1912 ; cites Newcombe from *Nineteenth Century*, January, 1909.



Let us examine, in company with Dr. Ivor Tuckett, some of the evidence for Telepathy. The earliest report on thought-reading submitted to the Society appeared in the first volume of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. It deals almost entirely with the thought-reading power of the children of the Rev. A. M. Creery. An account by Messrs. Barrett, Gurney, and Myers also appeared in the *Nineteenth Century* for June, 1882, and was severely criticized in the July number by Sir Bryan Donkin, "who pointed out that no real precautions against collusion were taken, that the experiments were of the sloppiest description, and that it was a most suspicious circumstance that the Rev. A. M. Creery's servant girl possessed the same power of thought-reading as the Creery children. Instances of the probable use of a code were also given."<sup>1</sup> Professor Sidgwick, the first President of the S. P. R., was so impressed by the record of these experiments that he considered them conclusive; but after two or three more reports on the Creery children had been published the children were actually detected using a code, and further experiments were abandoned. The next case of thought-reading investigated also occurred in 1882. This was the case of Mr. Blackburn, of Brighton, who claimed to have obtained some remarkable results in Telepathy with a Mr. G. A. Smith, a young mesmerist living at Brighton. The experiments were first carried out at Brighton, and then at a house in Dean's Yard,

<sup>1</sup> *Bedrock*, July, 1912, p. 195.

London. But thirty years later Mr. Blackburn, writing to the *Daily News* September 1 and 5, 1911, stated most explicitly that all their successes in thought-transference were worked by means of a code. He was equally candid in stating "that Messrs. Gurney and Myers were too anxious to get corroboration of their theories to hold the balance impartially. Again and again they gave the benefit of the doubt to experiments that were failures. They allowed us to impose our own conditions, accepted without demur our explanations of failure, and, in short, exhibited a complaisance which, however complimentary to us, was scarcely consonant with a strict investigation on behalf of the public." Mr. Blackburn gave as a reason for his "confession" the belated desire to promote the cause of truth, believing himself to be "the sole survivor of that group of experimentalists." But, as a matter of fact, Mr. Smith was not dead, and he replied with a categorical denial in the *Daily News* for September 4, 1911. As Dr. Ivor Tuckett remarks: "It is not possible to decide which of these two statements is the less trustworthy. But Mr. Smith acted as secretary to Messrs. Gurney and Myers for some years subsequent to the Brighton experiments, and took part in several other series of experiments, so that he had a powerful motive against admitting dishonesty in these experiments."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, what possible motive could induce Mr. Blackburn to declare that their success was due to trickery

<sup>1</sup> *Bedrock*, July, 1912, pp. 196-97.

and fraud if the performance were really genuine? He had nothing to gain by such a confession, save the ignominy of branding himself as an impostor.

That the thought-reading performance of Blackburn and Smith was the result of trickery is confirmed by an article contributed by Sir James Crichton-Browne to the *Westminster Gazette* for January 29, 1901, in which he describes some experiments undertaken with Blackburn and Smith at Dean's Yard, London, in the presence of himself, Dr. Francis Galton, Professor Romanes, and Mr. Myers. In this experiment Smith was blindfolded, and succeeded in reproducing a few regular or simple figures upon which Blackburn had concentrated his mind, but completely failed in reproducing an irregular figure which Professor Romanes and Sir James Crichton-Browne subsequently insisted on as a test when they began to suspect the use of a code. The next diagram was the shield on Dr. Galton's signet ring. This had an oval shape, but the reproduction was of a triangular shield. Sir James Crichton-Browne continues:—

By this time I was quite satisfied that Mr. S. was not effectually blindfolded, and that it was practicable for Mr. B. to communicate with him both by sight and hearing; so Romanes and I asked permission, which was granted, to blindfold him anew. We proceeded to do so *secundem artem*. Cotton-wool was procured, the sockets were packed, the ears were plugged, and a large handkerchief made all secure. After that several experiments were tried as before, but there never was the smallest response on the part of Mr. S. to Mr. B.'s volitional endeavours. There was no more flashing of images into his mind.

His pencil was idle. Thought transference was somehow interrupted.

Sir James Crichton-Browne concludes the account as follows: "I was invited to be critical and sceptical, and I was so. I daresay more credulously inclined people will think that my suspicions were unjust, and that no trick was practised—that was clearly the feeling of some of the psychical researchers present. The last scene of all, or passage of arms, I vividly recollect. Mr. Myers, standing in front of the fireplace, said: 'It must be allowed that this demonstration has been a total failure, and I attribute that to the offensive incredulity of Dr. Crichton-Browne.' To which I rejoined: 'I hope I always will show offensive incredulity when I find myself in the presence of patent imposture.'"<sup>1</sup>

As Professor Tyndall long ago remarked, the believers in Spiritualism "like to believe, and they do not like to be undeceived. Science is perfectly powerless in the presence of this frame of mind. It is, moreover, a state perfectly compatible with extreme intellectual subtlety and a capacity for devising hypotheses which only require the hardihood engendered by strong conviction or by callous mendacity to render them impregnable."<sup>2</sup>

For many years Sir Oliver Lodge has been conducting, by means of books, lectures, and articles in magazines, a propaganda in favour of Telepathy and Spiritualism, lamenting all the while the

<sup>1</sup> *Bedrock*, July, 1912, pp. 197-98.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Tyndall, "Science and the Spirits," *Fragments of Science* (1876), p. 321.

scepticism and indifference of the scientific world to the fads he adduces in support of his opinions. Dr. Ivor Tuckett, Sir Ray Lankester, and Sir Bryan Donkin, among others, have criticized Sir Oliver's theories, and shown that his so-called facts will not bear critical investigation;<sup>1</sup> and another scientific man has taken up Sir Oliver's challenge—namely, Dr. Charles, Mercier, the well-known author of several standard works—among others, *A New Logic*; *Psychology: Normal and Morbid*; *A Text-Book of Insanity*; *Criminal Responsibility*; and *Crime and Insanity*. Dr. Mercier has also been Examiner in Psychology to the University of London, and Lecturer on Insanity at the Medical Schools of the Westminster, Charing Cross, and Royal Free Hospitals.

As has been pointed out, the only really qualified investigators of Spiritualism are the psychologist, the conjurer, and the detective. Dr. Mercier is an eminent psychologist, and therefore well able to detect the weak spots in Sir Oliver Lodge's spiritual armour, which he has done in his book, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*. In the preface Dr. Mercier tells us that a copy of Sir Oliver Lodge's book, *Raymond*, was sent to him with a request that he would examine and review it. He proceeds:—

I found it impossible to do so. The sorrow of a bereaved mother is no fit matter for discussion by strangers in the public press. But the book revealed to me such an astounding mental attitude on the part of its author that I sent for a previous work of

<sup>1</sup> See *Bedrock*, January, 1913.



his, *The Survival of Man*, to discover on what ground he, a professor of a certain branch of physical science and the Principal of a University, speaking with the authority conferred by his occupancy of these positions, could make the assumptions that he does, and promulgate *urbi et orbi* such extraordinary doctrines. I have been engaged for some forty years in the study of the vagaries of the human mind in health and in disease, and am not easily surprised by witnessing new vagaries; but I must confess that *The Survival of Man* did surprise me. Upon inquiry I found that the doctrines and practices therein advocated have attained a very wide vogue. It may also be said that they are become the rage. ....The subject has never engaged my attention before. I came to it as a new-comer, and with an open mind. When I saw the consequences to which the doctrines and practices lead; when I read of a table laughing and executing caressing movements; when I read the drivel that is put into the mouths of dead men who when alive were of normal intelligence; I began to suspect that the foundation on which this structure was built was insecure.....For a considerable time my mind misgave me. Again and again I put the task aside as not worthy to engage the time that might be occupied in serious studies, and it seemed that such a structure raised on such foundations might well be left to fall to pieces of its own inherent rottenness; but on consideration of the following arguments advanced by my friends I determined to undertake the task.<sup>1</sup>

The main reason that impelled Dr. Mercier to this task was, to use his own words: "I know from my own medical experience that the pursuit of the occult, and especially of that form of it that used to

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*, pp. v-vi. The book may be obtained from Messrs. Watts & Co., 17 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4 (5s. net, by post 5s. 6d.).

go by the name of Spiritualism, but is now called Telepathy, Telergy, and other high-sounding names, leads to a morbid frame of mind, and tends to render those who are at all predisposed to insanity an easy prey to the disease. I am not alone in that opinion." In proof of which Dr. Mercier quotes from a recent annual report issued by Dr. G. M. Robertson, Superintendent of the Royal Asylum of Morningside, Edinburgh, who warns those who inherit a latent tendency to nervous disorders "to have nothing to do with practical inquiries of a Spiritualistic nature, lest they should awaken this dormant proclivity to hallucinations within their brains. I have known such a person who had lost her son following the procedure in vogue at present, under advice, first hearing of him through mediums, then getting into touch with him herself, and receiving messages from him, some as impressions and others as audible words, then increasing her circle of spiritual acquaintances, and living more for her spiritual world than for this, to the neglect of her husband and household, till finally God conversed with her in a low musical voice at all times, and confided His plans for the future to her. I would ask Spiritualists where, in this case, does Spiritualism end and mental disorder begin?"<sup>1</sup>

Sir Oliver Lodge approaches Spiritualism in the same spirit as that in which he approaches religion; and between the scientific spirit and the religious spirit there is open war, which must end by the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mercier. pp. vii-viii.

utter defeat of one or the other. Sir Oliver himself has pointed out this antagonism. In his *Man and the Universe* (1908, p. 11) he observes:—

In disposition, also, religion and science are opposite. Science cultivates a vigorous, adult, intelligent, serpent-like wisdom, and active interference with the course of nature; religion fosters a meek, receptive, child-hearted attitude of dove-like resignation to the Divine will.

And it is the child-hearted attitude he adopts in Spiritualistic investigations. Mr. Edward Clodd says that an intimate friend of Sir Oliver described him as “longing to believe something.” And Mr. Clodd further quotes Sir Oliver as arguing that “in dealing with psychical phenomena a hazy, muzzy state of mind is better than a mind ‘keenly awake’ and ‘on the spot.’”<sup>1</sup> Probably Dr. Mercier was not aware of these facts, or he would not have expressed such amazement at the simplicity and credulity shown by Sir Oliver Lodge in the presence of fraud and humbug.

For instance, Sir Oliver devotes nearly the whole of chapter iv of his *Survival of Man* to recording his experiments with the two daughters of Herr von Lyro during the summer of 1892, while staying for a fortnight at their house at Portsach am See, Carinthia. In this case one of the young ladies, while holding the hand of the other, was able to name the number of pips on cards that were invisible to the speaker, but visible to the sister who

<sup>1</sup> Edward Clodd, *Pioneers of Evolution* (1897), p. 136; citing from an Address to the S. P. R.; *Proceedings of the S. P. R.*, part xxvi, pp. 14-15.

held her hand; but when their hands were parted they could do nothing. Sir Oliver tells us "very slight contact was sufficient; for instance, through the backs of the knuckles; but directly the hands were separated, even though but a quarter of an inch, the phenomena ceased—reappearing again directly contact was established."<sup>1</sup>

As Dr. Mercier points out, in an analysis of Sir Oliver's account of this experiment, everything points to the use of the Morse code, and remarks:—

Out of sixteen attempts ten were successful. Really, the ladies must have been very clumsy if they could produce no better result than this after years of practice. I have had no practice at all, but I would undertake to get fifteen out of sixteen right at the first attempt, and to name the suit after five minutes' trial with a confederate. But note what follows: Sir Oliver Lodge enters into an elaborate mathematical calculation to show that this amazing result could not possibly be the result of chance guessing. He shows that the probabilities are 8,008 to  $13^{10}$  that it is not the result of chance. Less than one in a million, that is.<sup>2</sup>

But, as Dr. Mercier observes, "who on earth supposes that it was the result of chance?" And he compares Sir Oliver's mathematical calculation to the patter of the conjurer who wishes to distract attention from the things he does not wish to be seen. "What should be proved is that it could not have been due to collusion, and no mathematical calculation can prove this. The mathematics are a red herring—a red herring? They are 8,008 red

<sup>1</sup> Sir Oliver Lodge, *The Survival of Man* (1909), pp. 59-60.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*, p. 96.

herrings, they are 13<sup>10</sup> red herrings drawn across the scent.”<sup>1</sup>

Sir Oliver Lodge admits that this case is not strong enough to convince sceptics, although he has no doubt of its genuineness himself. As Dr. Mercier remarks, seeing that these experiments are, “on Sir Oliver Lodge’s own showing, utterly worthless, it is a pity that for the sake of his own reputation he did not suppress them.” As to Sir Oliver’s testimony as to the “absolutely genuine and artless manner” in which the young ladies operated and the “transparent honesty of purpose of all concerned,” Dr. Mercier caustically remarks: “What did he expect? Is it the custom for tricksters to behave so as to put their dupes on their guard? Did he watch to see whether Miss R. and Miss E. winked at one another? And as he did not detect them in winking did he conclude that they must be genuine? Is not every dupe of the confidence trick, or the gold brick swindle, or the Spanish prisoner swindle, perfectly convinced of the transparent honesty of purpose of all concerned? Did he expect that if they were not genuine they would come in masks and cloaks, and whisper together in corners? Apparently he did, and, since they behaved in the genuine and artless manner in which ordinary conjurers always do behave, he was convinced that they could not be conjurers? Of what value is his assurance that he believes these performances were genuine?”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mercier, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 89.



Sir Oliver's credulity in this affair is on a level with his belief in Eusapia Palladino—even after her exposure at Cambridge, when he declared that some of her phenomena might be due to trickery, but not all !

Again, Dr. Mercier joins issue with Sir Oliver upon a plain matter of fact. He quotes Sir Oliver Lodge's description of the appearance of Mrs. Piper when she wakes from the trance during which she communicates with the spirits of the dead: "The look of ecstasy on Mrs. Piper's face at a certain stage in the working process is manifestly similar to that seen in the faces of some dying people; and both describe the subjective visions as of something more beautiful and attractive than those on earth." This belief in the ecstatic look on the faces of the dying, and in the beautiful visions vouchsafed to them, has been made familiar by means of countless Christian tracts. In fact, nearly all Christian heroes are made to die uttering edifying sentiments and seeing glorious visions; while unbelievers and sceptics are made to see horrid sights and die in hopeless despair, to the sound of mocking laughter.

The falsity of these pictures hardly needs exposure nowadays; but the testimony of so eminent a practitioner as Dr. Mercier may be worth quoting:—

As a medical man of many years' residence in medical institutions, I am sure I have seen very many more dying people than Sir Oliver Lodge has, and I have never yet witnessed a look of ecstasy on the face of the dying person. I have asked old and experienced nurses who have seen many more people die than I have, and none of them will say that she

has seen a look of ecstasy on the face of a dying person. Dying people often murmur unintelligibly, but neither I nor any I have been able to consult has ever heard a dying person describe subjective visions of something more beautiful and attractive than those of earth. People who die slowly of disease almost always lose much of their consciousness a considerable time before death, and when they are so near death that they can be said to be certainly dying they have, so far as appearance goes, either no consciousness at all or so little that it compares with full consciousness as the light of the moon in its last quarter to the glare of the sun at noon. People in such a condition are speechless, and unable to describe any visions, even if they experienced any visions, which is in the last degree unlikely. This is not a criticism on a trivial point of detail. Mrs. Piper's look of ecstasy is adduced by Sir Oliver Lodge to assimilate her trance condition to the condition of the dying, and so to render more likely her communications with the dead. This is one of the rare instances in which we are able to test the accuracy of Sir Oliver Lodge's testimony, and it does not encourage us to place reliance on his testimony when we cannot test it.<sup>1</sup>

To return to Telepathy, Dr. Ivor Tuckett has remarked that "the curious fact about the evidence for psychic force, psychometry, spirit-control, and telepathy is that conclusive test cases are always attended by failure, and that in other cases the supposed successful observations can seldom or never be repeated."<sup>2</sup> In this matter they resemble miracles. People believe that the dead came to life again two thousand years ago; they also believe

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>2</sup> *Bedrock*, January, 1913, p. 483.

that at some distant day everybody will come to life again; but they cannot produce a case to-day.

Sir Ray Lankester tells us that when Sir Oliver Lodge, some years ago, declared that Telepathy had been discovered, he challenged the statement in a letter to the Press:—

I asked for the demonstration necessary to justify the assertion that Telepathy had been "discovered." I professed my willingness to investigate this phenomenon stated to occur in our midst and its asserted discovery. No opportunity of investigating it has ever been offered to me by those who declare that it exists. I was definitely refused the opportunity of examining the asserted phenomenon for which I applied to the Society for Psychical Research.<sup>1</sup>

Time and again money has been offered for a single test proof of Telepathy, without result. A gentleman wrote to the *Literary Guide* (August, 1910), saying: "My offer of paying £50 for a single case of Telepathy has been made so often during the last four or five years that I begin to doubt if there is any evidence worthy of the name—though I have read all the *ex parte* statements published to date."

A friend of Dr. Ivor Tuckett offered three of the leading English authorities on Telepathy £1,000 for satisfactory proof of one single case. The results were as follow:—

The first replied at once, expressing surprise at my imagining "that incontrovertible evidence could be obtained at all in an inductive problem"! The second at first very kindly expressed his willingness

<sup>1</sup> Sir Ray Lankester, *Bedrock*, January, 1913, p. 489.

to help, and appeared very keen to meet me and talk the matter over; but, after seeing No. 1, he wrote: "While anxious to help you, I could not undertake to prove the results of a long and difficult investigation to order or for a pecuniary offer"; and the third replied: "You may offer £1,000,000 with perfect safety. No sane person will back any mortal to do Telepathy to order."<sup>1</sup>

This offer of a thousand pounds has been publicly advertised in the *Times* without result. The only reply Sir Oliver Lodge makes to the offer is an outrageous insult. He says: "The business man takes another line, and offers a thousand pounds for proofs which will convince him. *He has, of course, no intention of parting with the money,* and is quite satisfied that he can resist any temptation to be convinced.....To all wagers of this kind I trust that those connected with the S. P. R. will always turn a deaf and contemptuous ear."<sup>2</sup>

We reproduce the advertisement, which was inserted in the *Times* for several days in August, 1911:—

#### TELEPATHY.

The sum of £1,000 has, during the past six months, been offered privately to the leading authorities and writers of repute on this subject for satisfactory proofs of so-called Thought-transference, but not one single case could be found; and it has now been decided to advertise publicly for the particulars required. Persons applying to the undersigned are requested to name their own terms for evidence that will stand cross-examination, and to state whether

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ivor Tuckett, *The Evidence for the Supernatural*, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> *Bedrock*, April, 1913, pp. 60-61. The italics are ours.

or not their communications are to be treated as confidential.

MATTHEW JARVIS, *Solicitor*.

4 Finsbury Square, London, E.C.

The telepathists offer tons of evidence on paper, but when a morsel of evidence is demanded as a test they turn "a deaf and contemptuous ear." To say the least, their reluctance is suspicious.

Telepathy, or Thought-transference, can never be proved until it is subjected to a scientific test; but Sir Oliver Lodge and his followers absolutely decline to furnish test cases to men like Dr. Ivor Tuckett and Sir Ray Lankester. They want us to believe these things on their word, without proof. Why should we? Sir Oliver Lodge, with other distinguished men, publicly declared that some of the phenomena produced by Eusapia Palladino could not have been produced by the known forces of Nature. He believes so still—at any rate, he has never publicly retracted his statement. We know now that all Eusapia's phenomena were nothing more nor less than common conjuring tricks. What reason is there to suppose that Sir Oliver Lodge is any more correct regarding Telepathy and spirit communications than he was concerning Eusapia Palladino?

Many scientific experiments have been made to test communication with the spirits of the dead. The best known was that devised by Mr. F. W. H. Myers. Mr. Myers's book, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, may be described as the New Testament of modern Spiritualism. It is an immense compilation, in two volumes, of the



phenomena of mediumship, hypnotism, telepathy, death-warnings, hallucinations, trances, etc. — a veritable encyclopædia of superstition. There is no doubt that the influence of this book has been very great, and has had much to do with the revival of Spiritualism.

Mr. Myers was an educated gentleman—he had been a classical lecturer at Cambridge—and there is no doubt that he honestly believed in the marvels he wrote about. Not only did he devote his life to seeking a firm foundation for Spiritualism, but he devised a test which, if it had proved successful, as he anticipated, would have convinced the world that the spirits of the dead continue to exist, and that they can communicate with the living. The test consisted of a message in a sealed letter, which Mr. Myers entrusted to Sir Oliver Lodge on the understanding that after his (Myers's) death he would communicate the message through some medium. Ten years later, on January 17, 1901, Mr. Myers died. On February 19, 1901, about a month after Myers's death, Sir Oliver Lodge had his first communication from Mr. Myers, through the mediumship of Mrs. Thompson. The spirit of Myers says :—

Lodge, it is not as easy as I thought in my impatience. Gurney (a deceased friend) says I am getting on first rate. But I am short of breath.

Sir Oliver : Do you want to say anything about the Society ?

Myers : What Society ?

Sir Oliver : You remember the S. P. R.

Myers : Do not think I have forgotten. But I have ; I have forgotten just now. Let me think.

After some more of this sort of thing, Myers tells Sir Oliver that he will see him in April; whereupon Sir Oliver asks: "And will you then read what you wrote in the envelope?" To which Myers replies: "What envelope?—I shall be told."

This is Sir Oliver Lodge's own account, as given in his *Survival of Man* (1909), pp. 287-88. Is it conceivable that the spirit of Myers, who spent his life in searching for evidence of the survival of the spirit after death, and left a message which, if reproduced, must bring conviction to the most stubborn sceptic, would answer in this fashion? Is it conceivable that a spirit would talk about being "short of breath"? Do spirits have lungs, then? And if so, how do they travel through the ether of space, where there is no air to breathe? Is it conceivable that Myers would ask, "What envelope?" when asked about the all-important message, and then reply, "I shall be told"? How could he be told? No one knew what message the sealed envelope contained but himself. Is it not as evident as the sun in the heavens that the communications are the communications of Mrs. Thompson, the medium, and not those of the discarnate spirit of Mr. Myers?

After this *séance* the spirit of Myers was in great demand; so much so that he complains through one medium that he can get no rest. Everybody is calling him, and he talks about everything and anything but the mysterious sealed envelope. However, nearly four years later the well-known medium, Mrs. Verrall, reported that the message had been communicated to her. Sir Oliver Lodge immediately

convened a meeting of the Council of the Society for Psychical Research, to be held at the Society's rooms, 20 Hanover Square, London; and on December 13, 1904, Sir Oliver Lodge obtained the envelope from the bank where it had been deposited, and produced it at the meeting. The highest expectations were aroused.

Here, in the fateful envelope, lay the crucial test—the answer to the question which so many agonizing souls had addressed to the remote and indifferent stars. If Mrs. Verrall had really received the test message from the spirit of Mr. Myers, the question would be settled once for all. The Materialist would be confounded; science itself would reel under the shock. To-morrow the news would flash over the world that the future life had been proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. The papers would be teeming with the news—the greatest revelation, thanks to Myers's foresight, the world had ever known.

We give the result in Sir Oliver Lodge's own words:—

On the envelope being opened, however, it was found that there was no resemblance between its actual contents and what was alleged by the script (of Mrs. Verrall) to be contained in it. It has, then, to be reported that this one experiment failed, and it cannot be denied that the failure is disappointing.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Oliver Lodge says "this one experiment failed"; but it is not the only failure. Dr. Hodgson, another member of the S.P.R., the exposé of

<sup>1</sup> Sir Oliver Lodge, *The Survival of Man*, p. 123.

Madame Blavatsky, also left a test letter behind, with the same result. Besides this, he "left behind him many private papers written in cipher. The key to the cipher is unknown to any one now living." He has promised to reveal it, but has not done so yet. He was unable to give the solution to two charades of his own composition. Podmore, who gives the above particulars, adds :—

He made many statements about his childhood, some true, some false, many unverified. His sister, to whom all the messages were sent, wrote: "To my mind there is nothing striking in any of the statements." She propounded in turn three test questions, to which the trance intelligence gave no reply. Moreover, the Piper-Hodgson (that is, the spirit of Hodgson, communicating through the mediumship of Mrs. Piper), when questioned by a sister, could not remember the name of his school-master in Melbourne. We have seen already that the Piper-Hodgson failed in England to recognize some of his intimate friends.<sup>1</sup>

That there are many people who honestly believe they receive messages from the dead I have no difficulty in believing. Those who have studied the history of witchcraft know that many witches were condemned to death on their own confession for having intercourse with the Devil, perhaps relying upon the power of the Devil to rescue them at the last moment. Flammarion, the French astronomer, has related the trust he once reposed in the spirits, and how he was disillusioned. He tells us :—

As is well known, I have been one of the stoutest apostles of Spiritualism. I always believed I was

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, p. 224.

having regular intercourse with the other world. Galileo's spirit never failed to come to me when summoned. His revelations about the appearance and manners of the inhabitants of other planets were incorporated in my writings always with the utmost confidence till modern instruments discovered five satellites of Jupiter and nine of Saturn, whereas what I believed was the spirit of Galileo always affirmed to me that Jupiter had four moons and Saturn eight. At first I felt sure the astronomers must be mistaken, but now I have seen with my own eyes. Therefore, as it is inadmissible that real spirits could err or jest, evidently my intercourse with Galileo was a long delusion. I acknowledge it frankly and without shame, because I have acted in good faith in this matter and refuse to lend support to error.<sup>1</sup>

Any account of the evidence for communion with the spirits of the dead would be incomplete without an examination of the claims of the celebrated medium, Mrs. Piper, who has practised as a medium for the past thirty years. One whole volume of 649 pages of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (vol. xvi) is devoted to the sittings of Mrs. Piper. Another volume of 652 pages (vol. xxviii), by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, is devoted to the study of the psychology of Mrs. Piper's trance phenomena. Many other volumes of the Society contain records of her sittings; many others have been published by the American S. P. R.; and many have been published independently of either Society, as in Sir Oliver Lodge's *Raymond*. "Certainly," says Podmore, "here, if in any case in

<sup>1</sup> *English Mechanic*, July 28, 1899.



the whole history of Spiritualism, is such evidence to be found.”<sup>1</sup> If it cannot be found here, it is useless to look elsewhere for it.

Mrs. Piper, then, is a trance medium, who has spent most of her life in Boston, U.S.A. “In 1884,” says Podmore, “as a young woman, she consulted for some ailment a professional clairvoyant named Dr. Cocke. At her second visit to Dr. Cocke Mrs. Piper herself became entranced, and was thereafter controlled by a large number of ‘spirits.’”<sup>2</sup>

Before going further it will be as well to explain, for the benefit of those who are not acquainted with the jargon of Spiritualism, the meaning of some of the terms used. At a sitting, or *séance*, there are at least three characters: (1) The Inquirer, or person who wishes to get into communication with the spirits. (2) The Medium, who claims to be endowed with an organization very sensitive to spiritual influences, and receives messages from the spirits. (3) The Control, or Familiar Spirit of the Medium, who seeks out and transmits messages to the medium from the spirit the inquirer wishes to consult, or from the spirit who wishes to deliver a message to the inquirer.

Why controls should be employed instead of direct communication with the spirit is not very clear, unless we are to understand that all spirits cannot communicate with the living, but only a few who are especially sensitive to human influences.

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, p. 164.

For our part, we heartily endorse the belief of Mr. Edward Clodd that the medium, the control, and the spirit—these “three are one.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the theory works out most conveniently for the medium, for if the information obtained is found to be untrue, which is often the case in spite of the ambiguity and general vagueness of the messages, then the blame is thrown on the spirit—a false or tricky spirit (a “lying devil,” as Oliver Cromwell would have called it) is personating the real spirit required.

When Mrs. Piper gives a sitting she goes off into a trance, her head resting on a cushion or pillow. During this trance it is claimed that her spirit leaves her body, and the spirit of her control enters in and takes possession, using Mrs. Piper’s organs of speech, or Mrs. Piper’s hand for writing. Latterly the communications have been in writing.

Mrs. Piper asserts that she has no knowledge of what takes place during the trance; has no idea of what she has been saying or writing, as the case may be. It is impossible to prove or disprove this statement, as the truth of the matter is known only to Mrs. Piper herself. Of course, *if* Mrs. Piper vacates her body and another spirit enters in, as the evil spirits used to enter the possessed, it would be unreasonable to expect Mrs. Piper to remember what she spoke or wrote. But the Spiritualists, in their clever theories, have overlooked one thing: What becomes of the spirit of Mrs. Piper? Does

<sup>1</sup> Edward Clodd, *Strand Magazine*, July, 1917, p. 52.

it remain close at hand, ready to return to Mrs. Piper's body directly the control vacates it? If so, how is it that Mrs. Piper knows nothing of what transpires? If, on the other hand, it goes wandering about, how is it she knows nothing about that? Spirits do not go into trances or become unconscious. We are assured that pure spirit, freed from the earthly shell or body, is pure intellect. No one ever heard of a sleeping spirit or an unconscious spirit. How is it that Mrs. Piper gives no account of what happened to her own spirit during the sitting? The most reasonable explanation is that spirits have nothing to do with the matter at all, and that the real author of the message is Mrs. Piper, and no one else.

The Spiritualists, however, call heaven and earth to witness to the honesty and veracity of Mrs. Piper. But, as Podmore points out:—

Now the fact that nearly all those who have had sittings with Mrs. Piper have been impressed by her transparent honesty is, in strictness, irrelevant. We have seen that many of Foster and Home's sitters were equally confident of the medium's honesty, and that, generally, the ability to impress his clients with confidence in his integrity is an essential part of a medium's equipment.<sup>1</sup>

And further: "Again and again we find persons, removed by education and social position from the ordinary temptations to fraud, who are engaged in the production of physical manifestations involving elaborate and systematic deception."<sup>2</sup> Of Madame

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 288.

Blavatsky he remarks: "It is impossible to doubt that for her, at any rate, there was an intellectual satisfaction to be derived from fooling the world, or that not inconsiderable part of the world which came under her influence. She was an artist in chicanery, a trickster not for gain only, but for glory. And researches in the squalid annals of Spiritualism have brought to light other cases where fraud was practised without the attraction of pecuniary or any social advantage."<sup>1</sup>

In the year following her visit to Dr. Cocke, Mrs. Piper first came under the observation of the Society for Psychical Research. She was then under the supposed control of a French physician named Dr. Phinuit. Now, Dr. Cocke's spirit control was claimed to be the spirit of a French physician named Finne or Finnett. Podmore remarks of this control:—

Phinuit appears to be a creation of the same order as Simandini and Leopold—Balsamo—Cagliostro. He was transferred, as we have seen, from a professional medium to Mrs. Piper. We first make his acquaintance in the questionable company of Chlorine and Mrs. Siddons. He claims to have been a doctor, but does not know the names of the Latin or French drugs which he prescribes, and cannot recognize common medicinal herbs when shown to him. He claims to have been a Frenchman, though his knowledge of French is apparently limited to a few common phrases and a slight accent, which frequently proved serviceable in the old days in disguising a bad shot at a proper name. His ignorance of French he has explained as being due

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Psychical Research*, p. 106.

to his having passed the later years of his life at Metz, where there were many English residents. He has given his full name, with particulars of his life at Paris ; but no trace of any person of his name can be found. On being more closely questioned he betrayed some uncertainty whether he had been born at Metz or Marseilles, and finally came to the conclusion that his name was not Phinuit at all, but Jean Alaen Seliville, and that he had never had any connection with Dr. Cocke.<sup>1</sup>

This popular spirit exercised almost exclusive control of Mrs. Piper for eleven years, until 1896, when he retired in favour of a band of superior spirits under the guidance of Imperator. The blunt fact is that, when the character of Phinuit began to grow thin under the ordeal of persistent questioning, he was dismissed in favour of Imperator—a more nebulous character, if possible—whose previous earth life is altogether unknown, and of which, we may be sure, Mrs. Piper, taught by experience, will make no disclosures. This Imperator was one of the controls of the late Stainton Moses, who died in 1892, and, being thus left unemployed, was no doubt glad to take service under Mrs. Piper.

“Now,” as Podmore points out, “Stainton Moses, as we have already seen, was a physical medium, and, as Imperator and his company can hardly be acquitted of connivance with their medium’s doings, the admission of their claims to substantiality would still further complicate Mrs. Piper’s case by involving it with the whole question of these presumably

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, pp. 282-83.



deceptive phenomena.”<sup>1</sup> Professor W. James, himself a believer in these occult phenomena, is of opinion that these controls “are all probably dream creations of Mrs. Piper.”<sup>2</sup> Sir Oliver Lodge says: “Whether such a man as Dr. Phinuit ever existed I do not know; nor, from the evidential point of view, do I greatly care.”<sup>3</sup> Surely he is easily satisfied! Regarding Phinuit’s often-remarked tendency to fish for information, Sir Oliver admits: “At times Dr. Phinuit does fish; occasionally he guesses; and sometimes he ekes out the scantiness of his information from the resources of a lively imagination.”<sup>4</sup>

What is Mrs. Piper’s own explanation of these things? According to Sir Oliver Lodge, “Mrs. Piper pretends to no knowledge as to her own powers, and I believe her assertion that she is absolutely ignorant of what she has said in the trance state. She appears to be anxious to get the phenomena elucidated, and hopes by sitting to scientific investigators to have light thrown on her abnormal condition, about which she expresses herself as not quite comfortable.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, continues Sir Oliver, “she herself, when in the trance state, asserts that she gets it by conversing with the deceased friends and relatives of people present.”<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Edward Clodd says: “Mrs. Piper, in October,

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 284, note.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Oliver Lodge, *The Survival of Man*, p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 201.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 211.

1901, made a confession denying that she had had any communications from the departed when she was in the trance state. She afterwards recanted, and a defender of the faith explained that her 'statement represented simply a transient mood.' But the fact of the confession remains, and the transient probably was the true. Let Sir Oliver and the rest of the credulous explain it as they may or can; ingenuity will never fail them."<sup>1</sup>

The quality of Dr. Phinuit's communications through Mrs. Piper may be judged by the verdict of Professor James, who declared, "I was too disgusted with Phinuit's tiresome twaddle to even note it down," and of Professor Shaler, who, after a *séance* in 1894, calls Phinuit a "preposterous scoundrel."<sup>2</sup> Yet Sir Oliver Lodge declares, with regard to Mrs. Piper, that the time for "suspicion" and "detective work" is over.<sup>3</sup>

Several attempts have been made to gain new astronomical knowledge from the spirits. We append a sample given by the supposed spirit of Sir Walter Scott, at the request of Professor W. Romaine Newbold, during a sitting with the medium, Mrs. Piper, June 27, 1895. Professor Newbold asks: "Sir Walter, is the sun all fire, or has it a solid mass?" To which the spirit replies that the sun is a solid body with a fiery envelope. But we had better give the exact words:—

<sup>1</sup> Edward Clodd, "Is Sir Oliver Lodge Right?" *Strand Magazine*, July, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, pp. 200-87.

<sup>3</sup> *Survival of Man*, p. 278.

Well, now we move on towards this fire, now reach its borders, and notwithstanding the extreme heat we pass through it, and we find ourselves upon a solid bed of hot clay or mud. This is caused by gravity. Understand where we are; we have now reached the limit; we find it very warm and deserted, like a deserted island. We wish to find its inhabitants if there are any—*i.e.*, if it has any. Now we see what we term monkeys, dreadful-looking creatures, black, extremely black, very wild. We find they live in caves which are made in the sand or mud, clay, etc. Now, Sir, for that I will be obliged to discontinue our journey until some future time.

Prof. Newbold : Will you come again ?

Sir Walter Scott : Yes, I will look down upon your planet and find you out. Good morrow, my friend. Leave the sun, or in other words we will remain on it. Adieu.

W. SCOTT.

The sitting continued next day; but in the meanwhile the spirit discovers that he has been making an ass of himself, with his black monkeys in the sun, and tries to put himself right by explaining that, finding the sun very hot, he followed the light to the earth, where he "saw the monkeys flying in and out of sand caves." This explanation does not meet the case, for we left the spirit in the sun at the end of the sitting.

Immediately after this lame and halting explanation the spirit makes another blunder just as bad. Professor Newbold asks : "What are the sun spots?"

Sir Walter Scott : This is the shadow of the earth, Sir.

Prof. Newbold : You are thinking of eclipses. I

understand this ; but I mean the black spots sometimes seen on the sun ?

Sir Walter Scott : Oh, I beg your pardon, Sir ; I did not understand your question-thoughts.

Prof. Newbold : I beg your pardon.

Sir Walter Scott : No, Sir ; I understand now the spots on the sun are.....yes, Sir.....are the so-called satellites which surround it ; this produces a dark mass of spots.<sup>1</sup>

An intelligent schoolboy would know better than that. When the Professor asks about the climate of Mars, he is told it is "Very fair ; it is in the *torrid zone*." As if the *torrid zone* existed somewhere in space, instead of being a zone on the earth !

When Professors Newbold and Hodgson were reading the record containing the description of monkeys being in the sun, they burst out laughing, and at the next sitting the spirit asks them what they were laughing at. Mrs. Henry Sidgwick describes this as a case of Telepathy.<sup>2</sup> It seems to me that nothing more than common sense was required to tell Mrs. Piper that her error had caused laughter. These are just the little points of acuteness where Mrs. Piper scores, and endeavours to turn defeats into victories.

At another sitting held by Dr. Hodgson with Mrs. Piper, Hodgson asked the spirit of Sir Walter Scott to take him beyond Saturn ; to which Scott replied : "I cannot catch your meaning, Sir. I

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 1915, pt. lxxi, vol. xxviii, pp. 442-43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 86.

cannot take you to planets that do not exist." Hodgson: "Haven't you seen a planet further away than Saturn?" Scott: "Mercury."

"In the interval between this sitting and the next," says Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, "Scott has apparently made inquiries, or consulted Mrs. Piper's half-lost memories.....an expedition to Uranus is spontaneously offered, and on July 5 to Neptune. The previous ignorance or forgetfulness is the more curious, as Neptune and its inhabitants turn out to be specially interesting, and are described at great length."<sup>1</sup>

All of which proves two things. Firstly, that the spirits know only what Mrs. Piper knows, and where she is ignorant they are ignorant. Secondly, that Mrs. Piper uses the intervals between sittings to acquire useful information.

The spirits communicating through Mrs. Piper are no more successful at prophecy than they are at giving correct astronomical knowledge. For instance, the spirit named "Rector" informs Dr. Hodgson—through the medium of Mrs. Piper—that Mrs. Piper will pass over to the spirit world (the cant phrase for dying) before him, and also tells Hodgson, "Thy life is only in its beginning."<sup>2</sup> Seven years later, in 1905, Hodgson died. Mrs. Piper has not "passed over" yet.

Again, in the year 1899 the spirit of Moses—the mythical hero of the Old Testament—prophesied also through the medium of Mrs. Piper the great

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 1915, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pt. lxxi, vol. xxviii, p. 332.



world-war that was about to take place: a thing, by the way, which was being predicted nearly every day by journalists, novelists, political writers, and many others. Dr. Hodgson inquired whether he would live to see it, and the spirit of Moses replied: "Thou shalt live in flesh to know all."<sup>1</sup> Dr. Hodgson died nine years before the Great War broke out. In the only details the old prophet gives of the coming conflict he is hopelessly wide of the mark. He declares that Germany will take no serious part in the war, which will be carried on by Russia in league with France against England in league with America!

We have given some instances of the spirits' ignorance of astronomy; and, as Mrs. Henry Sidgwick remarks, we should hardly expect the exalted spirits to use scientific terms "in a way that shows total want of understanding of what they are talking about." She continues:—

And the ignorance is not confined to science. Mrs. Piper might easily have given little attention to Old Testament history or the history of Christianity; but that Imperator, if the great spirit he professes to be, should undertake to instruct Hodgson in the true inwardness of these things, and contrive, even while confining himself to vague generalities, to talk so much nonsense about them, is difficult to conceive. Again, Mrs. Piper might well have erroneous notions concerning Adam Bede, and imagine him to be a real person whom she might meet in the other world; but it is hardly possible that (the spirit of) George Eliot should make

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 122.

a similar mistake and report having met him without expressing any surprise.<sup>1</sup>

But it was Dr. Stanley Hall who applied the decisive test to Mrs. Piper's spirits. In 1909 he had a sitting with Mrs. Piper, and she was supposed to be under the control of the spirit of Dr. Hodgson, who had then been dead four years. We quote from Mrs. Henry Sidgwick's account:—

Dr. Stanley Hall in 1909 took a short cut to positive evidence by deceiving the control Hodgson, and asking for a niece, Bessie Beals, who had never existed, but who was nevertheless produced at several sittings, and connected specific memories with the sitter—mainly, though not entirely, such as might be suggested by his statements and questions. When in the end Dr. Hall told Hodgson that he (Hall) had been deceiving him, and that there was no such person as Bessie Beals, Hodgson maintained her reality. The following is the report of the conversation (Miss Annie Tanner, *Studies in Spiritism*, p. 254):—

“Dr. Hall: Well, what do you say to this, Hodgson? I asked you to call Bessie Beals, and there is no such person. How do you explain that?”

“Hodgson: Bessie Beals is here, and not the ——”

(Note by Miss Tanner.)

[At this point we laughed, and I made some remark to the effect that that was just what we had said Hodgson would do, and the hand continued (writing) thus.]

“Hodgson: I know a Bessie Beals. Her mother asked about her before. Mother asked about her before.

“Dr. Hall: I don't know about that, Hodgson. Bessie Beals is a pure fiction.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 316.

"Hodgson: I refer to a lady who asked me the same thing and the same name.

"Dr. Hall: Guess you are wrong about that, Hodgson.

"Hodgson: Yes, I am mistaken in her. I am mistaken. Her name was not Bessie, but Jessie Beals."

Mrs. Sidgwick remarks on this: "We can only say about this explanation that it is not plausible. ....Dr. Hall might accidentally have hit on the name of a previous communicator, but it is very unlikely that this communicator would have had *memories appropriate to Dr. Hall's fictions and have admitted him as her uncle.*"<sup>1</sup> For our part, we believe that Mrs. Piper would put you into communication with the spirit of any one asked for, whether they ever existed or not. This exposure so upset Mrs. Piper that she gave up her trance-sittings for a time.

Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, who has made a careful analysis of Mrs. Piper's trance phenomena, running to a volume of 650 pages, comes to the conclusion that, "however true it may be that there is really communication between the living and the dead, the intelligence communicating directly through Mrs. Piper's organism is Mrs. Piper."<sup>2</sup> And she cites the testimony of Professor William James, who favoured the idea of the spirits communicating through Mrs. Piper "all being dream creations of Mrs. Piper, probably having no existence except when she is in a trance, but consolidated by repeti-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 178. The italics are ours.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

tion into personalities consistent enough to play their several roles."

How, then, can we account for Mrs. Piper's success as a medium for so many years, and for the unbounded confidence reposed in her by men like Sir Oliver Lodge? Upon what facts is this confidence based?

As we have seen, Mrs. Piper has made no revelations in science; her efforts in astronomy were utterly childish. Her attempts at prophecy have turned out to be ridiculously wide of the mark. She has never revealed a scrap of useful knowledge in all the years of her mediumship.

Mr. Podmore, who made a long and exhaustive examination of Mrs. Piper's trance utterances, observes that "her real strength lies in describing the diseases, personal idiosyncrasies, thoughts, feelings, and character of the sitter and his friends; their loves, hates, quarrels, sympathies, and mutual relationships in general; trivial but insignificant incidents in their past histories, and the like. Not only is information on such points as these more difficult to acquire by normal means, but it is much more difficult to retain in the memory."<sup>1</sup> Well, if we grant that, though difficult, it is not impossible to acquire the information sought in a natural way, and if we credit Mrs. Piper with a very capable memory, there is no need for any supernormal explanation, especially if we consider her method of imparting her trance revelations. For, as Podmore further points out:—

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, pp. 341-42.

Her trance personality does not commonly deal in precise and categorical statements of fact; names are frequently uttered or written piecemeal and in tentative form; diseases are diagnosed by symptoms often by no means distinctive; persons are indicated by descriptions of a dubious kind; incidents and relationships are shadowed forth by obscure and inadequate hints. In a word, the information given is very generally incomplete or of uncertain meaning, and needs expert interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, and it is "expert interpretation" that can always be relied upon from the believers in Mrs. Piper.

Podmore, in stating his difference of opinion with Professor Hyslop in regard to Mrs. Piper, concludes: "I cannot point to a single instance in which a precise and unambiguous piece of information has been furnished of a kind which could not have proceeded from the medium's own mind, working upon the materials provided and the hints let drop by the sitter. I agree with Professor Hyslop in rejecting Telepathy as the explanation of these latest revelations, not, however, as being inadequate, but as being superfluous. I do not ask the reader to accept my judgment on the case. The point of the illustration is that a subject in which it is possible for two honest and fairly competent investigators from the same set of facts to deduce such divergent conclusions is clearly not yet sufficiently advanced to serve as a basis for any but the most modest generalizations."<sup>2</sup>

We have given instances of the uniform failure

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, vol. ii, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, vol. ii, pp. 346.



of mediums to answer test questions, notably in the case of Mrs. Verrall's and Myers's test letter; and, as Podmore observes:—

A weighty objection to accepting Mrs. Piper's trance personalities at their own valuation is that they have again and again failed to answer the test questions put to them, and that the manner of their failure has often proved more fatal to their claim than the failure itself. Thus the *soi-disant* (spirit of) Hannah Wild on several occasions dictated what professed to be a copy of the contents of a sealed letter written by the real Hannah Wild before her death for the express purpose of the test; and all these versions were entirely wide of the mark.<sup>1</sup>

In conclusion, Podmore declares: "It is impossible to believe that in these trance utterances [of Mrs. Piper] we are listening to authentic and unembarrassed messages from the dead." But Sir Oliver Lodge finds no difficulty in believing it, and in trying to foist his belief on everybody else.

Sir Oliver Lodge tells us that Mrs. Piper has revealed things while in a state of trance that she had no knowledge of during her ordinary state. For instance, he claims that the spirit of Dr. Phinuit—through the mediumship of Mrs. Piper—recognized a ring worn by Lady Lodge as having been given to Sir Oliver Lodge for her by an aunt shortly before her death. He also called for a locket that Lady Lodge sometimes wears, but was not wearing at the time, which had belonged to her father forty years before; and many similar insignificant and useless facts. Sir Oliver Lodge declares

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii, p. 346.

that Mrs. Piper did not know, and could not have known, the fact concerning these articles. "But," as Dr. Mercier very pertinently points out, "what opportunity had Dr. Phinuit of knowing these things? We have no evidence except Mrs. Piper's assertion that Dr. Phinuit ever existed even in the spirit, and we have no evidence at all that he ever existed in the flesh.....Now it is significant that, though we do not know what opportunities Dr. Phinuit had of studying the Lodge family, we do know something of the opportunities that Mrs. Piper had of studying it. Mrs. Piper seems to have been a frequent visitor of the Lodges. She stayed in their house on one visit for nine days, and on another for five days at a time; and *neither Mrs. Piper nor Sir Oliver Lodge has ever been cross-examined with respect to these visits.*"<sup>1</sup>

As Dr. Mercier further remarks, when ladies stay in the same house on intimate terms they sometimes visit one another in their respective bedrooms, and then it is usual for the visitor to admire her hostess's possessions, and to go into little raptures over them; and upon this encouragement the hostess may relate how the trinket that is so sweet came into her possession, or what its history is. Or Mrs. Piper may have gained the knowledge from the daughter of the house, who may have been wearing the trinkets for the time being. Or she may have picked up the information during the course of ordinary conversation. All sorts of topics turn up

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Charles A. Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*, pp. 114-15. The italics are Dr. Mercier's.

in conversation when a guest is staying in the house, and it would be quite possible for Mrs. Piper to turn the conversation on to the subject of trinkets such as these, for the express purpose of using the information during her trance sittings.

This is borne out by the fact, noticed by Dr. Mercier, that "as Phinuit, or Mrs. Piper (I think we may as well give him his proper name), becomes more and more intimate with the Lodge family, the skilful guesses and well-directed shots either become fewer, or they become better directed, for mistakes are better avoided, and 'fishing' becomes less conspicuous."

Dr. Mercier asks Sir Oliver to point out "where the necessity is for the performance of a miracle," and proceeds :—

For let there be no mistake, no misunderstanding. What you assert is the occurrence of the miraculous. You may call Dr. Phinuit a "discarnate intelligence" and his knowledge supernormal, but I submit to you that a discarnate intelligence is another name for a ghost or spook; and supernormal is another name for supernatural or miraculous. Can you deny it? Do you deny it? If so, please point out the difference between a discarnate intelligence and a spook, between what is merely supernormal and what is supernatural and miraculous. I suggest that you avoid the old and well-known and well-established words because they are discredited, and you as "a scientific" man are ashamed to use them; and I suggest that you use the terms "discarnate intelligence" and "supernormal" to soften down the shock that your readers would receive from the use of "ghost" or "spook," or "supernatural" or "miraculous," and to make them suppose that what

you ask them to believe is something less than a ghost, and something less than a miracle.<sup>1</sup>

In his latest book, *Raymond* (named after Sir Oliver Lodge's youngest son, who was killed at the Front in 1915), Sir Oliver Lodge claims that he was forewarned by the spirits of the impending death of his son; the spirits also informing him of the existence of a photograph of Raymond, in a group, taken while serving in France, and of which the family were previously quite unaware.

On August 8, 1915, a few weeks before Raymond's death, a Miss Robbins was having a sitting with Mrs. Piper, then in America, when a message was received from the spirit of Myers, communicated to Mrs. Piper by the spirit of Richard Hodgson. Miss Alta Piper (Mrs. Piper's daughter) sent the message on to Sir Oliver Lodge. It runs as follows:—

Hodgson: Now, Lodge, while we are not here as of old—*i.e.*, not quite, we are here enough to take and give messages. Myers says you take the part of the poet, and he will act as Faunus. Faunus!

Miss Robbins: Faunus?

Hodgson: Yes, Myers. *Protect*. He (Lodge) will understand. What have you to say, Lodge? Good work. Ask Verrall; she will also understand. Arthur says so. [This "Arthur" means Dr. Arthur Verrall, the deceased husband of Mrs. Verrall.]

Miss Robbins: Do you mean Arthur Tennyson?

Hodgson: No. Myers knows. So does ——. You got mixed (to Miss R.). But Myers is straight about poet and Faunus.<sup>2</sup>

Sir Oliver Lodge promptly communicated the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*, pp. 118-19.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Oliver Lodge, *Raymond*, pp. 90-91.

message to Mrs. Verrall, as the spirits advised. Mrs. Verrall referred him to Horace's Ode (*Carm.* ii, xvii, 27-30), where Horace describes himself as nearly killed by a falling tree, the impending blow being lightened by Faunus, the guardian of the poets. "Sir Oliver, naturally enough, could not make head or tail of the message, but was inclined to think that it referred to some possibly approaching financial loss to himself which Myers might propose to avert—an instance of, at any rate, the 'futility' of Spiritualistic messages or warnings."<sup>1</sup>

Sir Oliver did not connect the message with Raymond until after his death in action on September 14, 1915. He then wrote to the Rev. M. A. Bayfield about the matter, complaining that Myers "had not been able to ward off the blow." This clerical gentleman rose to the occasion, and interpreted the oracle. It is astonishing how many different interpretations these spirit messages may be made to assume; the spirits seem to make a point of being as vague and ambiguous as possible. He explained that the "lightening of the blow" referred, not to Raymond, but to Sir Oliver himself, and that the "warning" was intended to "protect" Sir Oliver from being overwhelmed by the news of the death of his son. Major Cook observes:—

This somewhat far-fetched interpretation Sir Oliver accepts as final and convincing. It probably explains in great measure Sir Oliver's acceptance, on equally slight grounds, of all the other "evidences"

<sup>1</sup> W. Cook, *Reflections on Raymond*, p. 46.



regarding Raymond's "communications" to him and to his family which followed.

To the writer, at any rate, the following explanation of the "message" appears at least equally probable, and, indeed, in all the circumstances of the case, at any rate less far-fetched than that of the Rev. Bayfield:—

Mrs. Piper, being, through her daughter, Miss Alta, in frequent correspondence with Sir Oliver, may well have been, and in all probability (as indicated above) was, aware that he had a son at the Front, like many other people, with several sons, at the time in England. The "message," if it means anything at all, much more closely resembles an intimation of (and a counting by Mrs. Piper on) the extreme probability that this son of Sir Oliver's at the Front would be wounded, but, through the spirit-intervention of Myers, *like Horace the Poet*, not killed.<sup>1</sup>

Major Cook further points out that Raymond Lodge was born in the year of Mrs. Piper's first visit to England, in 1889; and being a boy of seventeen, and possibly away at school at the time of Mrs. Piper's second visit in 1906, may not have been known to her at all. "It is much more probable that Mrs. Piper had Raymond's eldest brother Oliver in her mind as, probably, the son of Sir Oliver at the Front. Moreover, Oliver is the 'poet' of the family, and has written and published a volume of his poems. The allusion to the 'poet,' therefore, in the message, and the implied happening to *him* of some *physical* injury ('Myers is straight about poet and Faunus'), are naturally enough in

<sup>1</sup> W. Cook, pp. 48-49.

Mrs. Piper's own mouth, writing, or normal consciousness, and do not appear to call for any 'supernormal' or other explanation than a desire on Mrs. Piper's part to supply material, through Sir Oliver Lodge, for the investigations of the Society for Psychical Research, which she habitually does."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, as the same writer points out, if the message really came from the spirit calling itself "Myers," then, "on the plain interpretation of the message, 'Myers' is not a spirit of Truth, but—as Oliver Cromwell described a similarly reported 'communicator'—a 'lying devil'; for 'Myers' predicted what did not happen, and undertook what he did not perform."

To sum up the matter, the message, as a prophecy, was false; for Raymond was not "protected" by Myers, but was killed. As a warning it was a total failure, for Sir Oliver Lodge did not connect the message with Raymond at all until after his death, but inclined to think that it referred to some financial loss to himself which Myers might avert.

If Myers could see what was coming and wished to warn Sir Oliver, surely he would have sent a plain and straightforward message which any one could understand, and not this rigmarole, capable of several meanings and of application to several different persons.

The plain fact is that Mrs. Piper drew a bow at a venture. She knew that one of Sir Oliver's sons was at the Front, and speculated on the chance of

<sup>1</sup> W. Cook, pp. 49-50.

his being wounded. But she purposely made the message so vague that, in the event of nothing happening, it could not be cited as a false prophecy, and, in fact, could be applied to any misfortune that might happen to one of Sir Oliver's family, or to Sir Oliver himself.

We now come to the photograph incident, which Sir Oliver Lodge describes as "a peculiarly good piece of evidence," "a first-class case," and "one of the best pieces of evidence." Major Cook has analysed this first-class piece of evidence in his little book, *Reflections on "Raymond."* Let us, in his company, see what Sir Oliver considers good evidence.

On August 24, 1915, a "group photograph" of twenty-one officers, with Second-Lieutenant Raymond Lodge among them, was taken in France. Three negatives were made, and these, with proofs only, were submitted by the photographer to Captain Boast, a brother officer of Raymond's. As the photographer had not enough printing-paper to supply all the officers with copies, Captain Boast purchased the negatives and sent them for printing to Messrs. Gale and Polden, in England, who received them on October 15, 1915. A large number of photographs appear to have been printed from these negatives, for Mrs. B. P. Cheves alone—the mother of the Medical Officer attached to Raymond's regiment—had, on November 28, 1915, half-a-dozen copies in her possession (with a key to the names). On this date Mrs. Cheves wrote to Lady Lodge, offering her one of the photographs;

and Lady Lodge promptly accepted. There was some unexplained delay in forwarding the photograph, and, in reply to a letter of inquiry by Lady Lodge regarding this, another note was received from Mrs. Cheves on December 7, stating that the photograph was being sent. So there was at least nine days' interval between the reception of the news of the existence of the photograph in Sir Oliver's household and the reception of the photograph itself. It is important to bear this in mind, as we shall see.

It is not known positively whether Raymond ever saw the photograph. He never saw the negatives; and Captain Boast, writing in reply to Sir Oliver's query on this point nearly eleven months after the photograph was taken, thinks that Raymond did see the proofs, but "cannot say positively," although he regards it as "highly probable." On September 12 Raymond went into the trenches, and on September 14 he was killed in action.

Sir Oliver Lodge claims that the first intimation of the existence of this photograph was from the spirit of Raymond himself. On September 27 Mr. Vout Peters, a medium, at a sitting with Lady Lodge, professed to receive a message from the spirit of Raymond through the agency of his "familiar spirit" or control, "Moonstone." He refers to the existence of *this particular* group photograph (so Sir Oliver asserts), saying, "He is particular that I should tell you of this."

On December 3, 1915, two months and six days afterwards, Mrs. Leonard (another medium), speak-

ing for the spirit of Raymond through her "familiar spirit" "Fedá," describes this photograph with remarkable accuracy.

Sir Oliver Lodge claims that we have here genuine supernormal evidence of Raymond's "surviving personality" in giving this information, because on September 27 the negatives were not in England, and on December 3 neither he (Sir Oliver Lodge) nor any member of his family had seen a print or copy of it.

Let us consider the communication of the medium Mr. Vout Peters through the agency of "Moonstone," who is in communication with Raymond. "Moonstone" is supposed to be the spirit of a patriarch who lived to the age of one hundred years, and was a "yogi" in his earth life. This is the communication:—

"You have several portraits of this boy. *Before he went away* you had a good portrait of him—two—no, three. [Note by Sir Oliver: "Fully as many as that."] Two where he is alone, and one where he is in a group of other men. He is particular that I should tell you this. In one you see his walking-stick." [Note by Miss Kennedy: "'Moonstone' (*i.e.*, Peters) here put an imaginary stick under his arm."] [Note by Sir Oliver: "Not known yet."]

This is the only reference to any group photo given by Peters. In his later sitting with Sir Oliver, on October 29, 1915—a month before news of the photo arrived—he makes no mention of it.

Major Cook comments on Peters's communication as follows:—



Peters, on September 27, refers to *one* group photograph in which Raymond appears with "other men"—an experience common to hundreds, or thousands, of other young officers in the new Army. He mentions Raymond's appearance in this group with a stick—an appendage to uniform also common to practically all officers of the new Army, and carried by apparently every other officer in the group photograph reproduced in Sir Oliver's book.

So far, Peters's general reference to *a* group photograph (in which Raymond appears) was a perfectly safe one to venture on as regards practically any young officer of the new Army. Peters's further *particulars*, however, show conclusively that his reference to *a* group photograph can apply correctly neither to the particular group reproduced in Sir Oliver Lodge's book (upon which Sir Oliver relies) nor to Raymond; because in the latter group Raymond's stick is not under his arm, but on the ground across his foot, and not held by him in any way; and also because neither in this nor in any other photograph in Sir Oliver's book does Raymond show the slightest vestige of the moustache with which Peter supplies him elsewhere in the same "sitting." No one, not even a medium making "shots" at random, could have made more mistakes than Peters crowds into his short reference to photographs of Raymond on September 27.

Peters finally "plumps" for three photographs only as in possession of Raymond's family at the date on which he (Peters) is speaking. "*Two* where he is alone, and *one* where he is in a group with other men."

Sir Oliver himself counters this assertion by the "note": "Fully as many as that"—*i.e.*, Peters has understated the number of photographs.<sup>1</sup>

But, above all (and this puts the matter out of court altogether as evidence), Peters states that

<sup>1</sup> W. Cook, *Reflections on Raymond*, pp. 79-80-81.

this one group photograph was in the possession of the family before Raymond went away. As we have seen, and as Sir Oliver knew well, it was not taken until he reached France. Yet Sir Oliver takes no notice of all these glaring discrepancies. He is so determined to find proofs that he turns a blind eye to everything that tells against his position.

As Major Cook emphatically remarks: "The inference is plain that Peters's reference on September 27 to photographs, whether group or otherwise, was merely a random 'shot' at matters of which he had no definite knowledge, whether 'supernormal' or otherwise—a random and bad 'shot' similar to his later attempt at the same 'sitting,' when he says: 'You have in your house prizes' (athletic) 'which he won.' This assertion is dismissed by Sir Oliver as incorrect."<sup>1</sup>

The second reference to the photograph was at the sitting with the medium Mrs. Leonard on December 3, 1915, the spirit of Raymond communicating through "Feda," Mrs. Leonard's control, supposed to be the spirit of a little Indian girl. It would take too long to reproduce this communication, but we may take the account of it by Major Cook as correct. He describes it as "vague and shuffling as regards several details with regard to which one of those who had sat for the original could hardly be in any doubt, but strikingly accurate as regards other details easy enough to be remem-

<sup>1</sup> W. Cook, p. 82.

bered by one who had merely seen, or had heard a description by another person who had seen, a copy, and to whom the existence of a 'key' was not unknown, but who had not a particularly good memory for names."<sup>1</sup>

One of the details described by Raymond through "Feda" through Mrs. Leonard—what a journey!—was the appearance of certain horizontal and vertical lines on the background of the photograph. These lines are due to binders and joints of the woodwork of the hut which forms the background of the group. Now, as Major Cook points out, these lines would not have been visible to Raymond, as he was sitting with his back to the hut; neither, we may add, would he have thought them worth mentioning if he had noticed them. But to a person who had only seen the photo they would appear most striking.

There is not the slightest doubt in the present writer's mind that Mrs. Leonard had seen the photo in question. Let us go over the dates again. Captain Boast sent the negatives to England, where they arrived on October 15, 1915. A large number of copies appear to have been printed—there were twenty-one officers and their friends to supply. On November 28 Mrs. Cheves had six in her possession, with a key to the names, and wrote offering Lady Lodge a copy, which was not sent until December 7, after an interval of nine days.

On November 28, then, it was common knowledge

<sup>1</sup> W. Cook, p. 86.

in Sir Oliver's household that the photo existed. On December 3, five days later, Mrs. Leonard describes the photo at a sitting with Sir Oliver. Five days gave ample time for her to obtain a copy of the photo; and the unfortunate delay of Mrs. Cheves in not sending her copy until the 7th gave just the chance needed to work the miracle.

Such is the evidence with which Sir Oliver Lodge would convert the world !

Sir Oliver prefaces this record of the photograph with the remark: "This is a long record, because I took verbatim notes; but I propose to inflict it all upon the reader, in accordance with promise to report unverifiable and possibly absurd matter, just as it comes, and even to encourage it."<sup>1</sup> But why should the spirits wish to communicate "absurd matter"? And why on earth should Sir Oliver encourage them in it?

That they did communicate absurd matter the following extract from this sitting will show. Mrs. Leonard—we leave out the pretended spirits of "Feda" and Raymond—speaking of the spirit world, says:—

People here try to provide everything that is wanted. A chap came over the other day who *would* have a cigar. "That's finished them," he thought. He means he thought they would never be able to provide that. But there are laboratories over here, and they manufacture all sorts of things in them. Not like you do out of solid matter, but out of essences and ethers and gases. It's not the same as on the earth plane, but they were able to

<sup>1</sup> *Raymond*, p. 192.

manufacture what looked like a cigar.....Some want meat and some strong drink; they call for whisky sodas. Don't think I'm stretching it when I tell you that they can manufacture even that.<sup>1</sup>

In the same sitting the supposed spirit of Raymond says: "My suit, I expect, was made from damaged worsted on your side.....You know flowers, how they decay. We have got flowers here; your damaged flowers flower again with us—beautiful flowers." And, further, we learn: "He (Raymond) has brought that doggie again, nice doggie.....He's got a cat, too; plenty of animals, he says."<sup>2</sup>

Certainly Sir Oliver seems to have some glimmering of the absurdity of this spiritual information, for in a footnote to the episode about the decayed flowers he remarks: "I have not yet traced the source of all this supposed information." Well, it came from the same source as the information about the photograph; for it was delivered during the same sitting.

A great deal has been made by Spiritualists of what they call "cross-correspondences"—a cross-correspondence being defined as similar words, or a similar idea, appearing in the automatic writings of two independent mediums. In this matter we are of the same opinion as Dr. Mercier, who observes: they "are so few, so ambiguous, and need so much amplification by the imaginative ingenuity of the believer, as to make very little impression upon any one who is not ready and determined to believe in spite of his own reason.....There

<sup>1</sup> *Raymond*, pp. 197-98.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 199-203.



are very few of these so-called cross-correspondences on record; they are extremely obscure, and need a great deal of torturing and interpreting and glossing before they can be twisted into any appearance of referring to the same thing, or of emanating from the same source.”<sup>1</sup>

A great deal more could be written to expose the folly and fraud responsible for the prevalent beliefs in Telepathy and Spiritualism; but enough has been said to convince any unbiased reader of the utter want of scientific evidence in favour of these delusions. If any one, after studying the evidence, still believes in these things, it is unlikely that any further evidence in any quantity will have any effect. This subject has been too long neglected by Rationalists; they have been too prone to dismiss the subject as not worth discussing. In the meantime this superstition has been growing apace. “That it is very extensive,” says Dr. Mercier, “is shown in the first place by the enormous sale of the book *Raymond*—a sale that might be envied by the writer of the most popular novels.”

It seems incredible that such a state of things should prevail in the twentieth century. If we are destined, in a future life, to deliver messages similar to those we have discussed, we may well despair of the future; as Huxley remarked, “it adds another terror to death.” Another writer<sup>2</sup> similarly asks:—

When we are banished from the earthly body are we to join the wordy rabble which speaks by the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*, pp. 110-11.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, July 9, 1908.

mouth or the pen of the mediums? These wild utterances do not seem as a rule like revelations of the secrets of the prison-house, but rather like gibberings from a lunatic asylum, peopled by inmates of vulgar behaviour and the lowest morals; creatures that lie and cheat, give false names and unverifiable addresses. But the fact that things are unpleasant is no evidence that they are untrue; besides, in some cases the "personalities" talk very good sense, quote Plotinus, and write really charming poetry. So much depends on whose ghost it is; but still more on whose lips or hands it is by which it communicates. That is the main difficulty about the spirit hypothesis: the unmistakable colour which the communications get through the medium. The late Mr. Frederick Myers cites Homer and Plato in the original through Mrs. Verrall, who is a lecturer at Cambridge; through Mrs. Holland, whose culture is not classical, he quotes nothing more abstruse than Tennyson and Rossetti; whereas, through Mrs. Piper, the postmaster's wife, he can only ejaculate bluntly "Browning."

There is no need to go behind the medium for the source of these "spirit" communications. As Tyndall well said: "Science has given us all the knowledge of the universe which we now possess, while Spiritualism has added nothing to that knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tyndall, *Fragments of Science* (1876), p. 322.

54090

PRINTED BY WATTS AND CO.,  
17 JOHNSON'S COURT,  
FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.

THE CONVERSION OF

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 678 408 6

56 pp.; cloth, 2s. net. by post 2s. 3d.; paper cover,  
9d. net, by post 10d.

# SPIRIT EXPERIENCES

BY CHARLES MERCIER,  
M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.C.S.

STARTLING AND ASTONISHING EXPERIENCES OF A  
SEEKER AFTER TRUTH

UNPRECEDENTED MARVELS

TELEPATHY

LEVITATION

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE DEAD

TELERGY

A COMPLETELY NOVEL EXPERIENCE

SUBSTITUTION

WATTS & CO., JOHNSON'S CT., FLEET ST., E.C.4.

# R.P.A. CHEAP REPRINTS

EACH 1s. NET (except those marked with a X), BY POST 1s. 2½d.

- \* **Huxley's Lectures & Essays.** (A Selection.)
- \* **The Pioneers of Evolution.** By EDWARD CLODD.
- Modern Science & Modern Thought.** By SAMUEL LAING.
- \* **Literature and Dogma.** By MATTHEW ARNOLD.
- \* **Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical.** By HERBERT SPENCER.
- \* **The Evolution of the Idea of God.** By GRANT ALLEN.
- \* **Human Origins.** By SAMUEL LAING.
- \* **The Service of Man.** By J. COTTER MORISON.
- Tyndall's Lectures and Essays.**
- \* **The Origin of Species.** By CHARLES DARWIN.
- Emerson's Addresses and Essays.** (A Selection.)
- \* **On Liberty.** By J. S. MILL.
- \* **The Story of Creation.** By EDWARD CLODD.
- \* **An Agnostic's Apology.** By SIR LESLIE STEPHEN.
- Life of Jesus.** By ERNEST RENAN.
- An Introduction to the Philosophy of Herbert Spencer.** By Prof. W. H. HUDSON.
- \* **Three Essays on Religion.** By JOHN STUART MILL.
- The Creed of Christendom.** By W. R. GREG.
- The Apostles.** By ERNEST RENAN.
- \* **Problems of the Future.** By S. LAING.
- \* **Wonders of Life.** By ERNST HAECKEL.
- \* **Jesus of Nazareth.** By EDWARD CLODD.
- \* **God and the Bible.** By MATTHEW ARNOLD.
- X† **The Evolution of Man.** By ERNST HAECKEL. Complete in one vol., paper 2s. 6d. net, cloth 4s. net.
- \* **Hume's Essays: I.**—An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding. II.—An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.
- Herbert Spencer's Essays.** (A Selection.)
- \* **An Easy Outline of Evolution.** By DENNIS HIRD, M.A.
- Phases of Faith.** By F. W. NEWMAN.
- Man's Place in Nature.** By T. H. HUXLEY.
- The Origins of Religion.** By ANDREW LANG.
- Twelve Lectures and Essays.** By T. H. HUXLEY.
- Haeckel: His Life and Work.** By WILHELM BÖLSCHÉ.
- X† **Life of Thomas Paine.** By MONCURE D. CONWAY. Complete in one vol., cloth, 4s. net.
- \* **Hand of God.** By GRANT ALLEN.
- \* **The Nature and Origin of Living Matter.** By Dr. H. CHARLTON BASTIAN.
- X† **Last Words on Evolution.** By ERNST HAECKEL. (Now published only in cr. 8vo at 3d. net.)
- Paganism and Christianity.** By J. A. FARRER.
- X† **History of Rationalism.** By W. E. H. LECKY. In 2 vols.
- Aphorisms and Reflections.** By T. H. HUXLEY.
- X† **History of European Morals.** By W. E. H. LECKY. In 2 vols.
- Selected Works of Voltaire.** Translated by J. MCCABE.
- The Kingdom of Man.** By SIR RAY LANKESTER.
- Twelve Years in a Monastery.** By JOSEPH MCCABE.
- \* **Lectures & Essays.** By Professor W. K. CLIFFORD.

The whole of the above list, with the exception of those marked with an \*, † or a ‡, may be had in cloth at 2s. net.

\* In paper cover only. † In cloth, complete, at 4s. net. ‡ In cloth at 3s. 6d. net.

London: WATTS & CO., 17 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, E.C.4.